

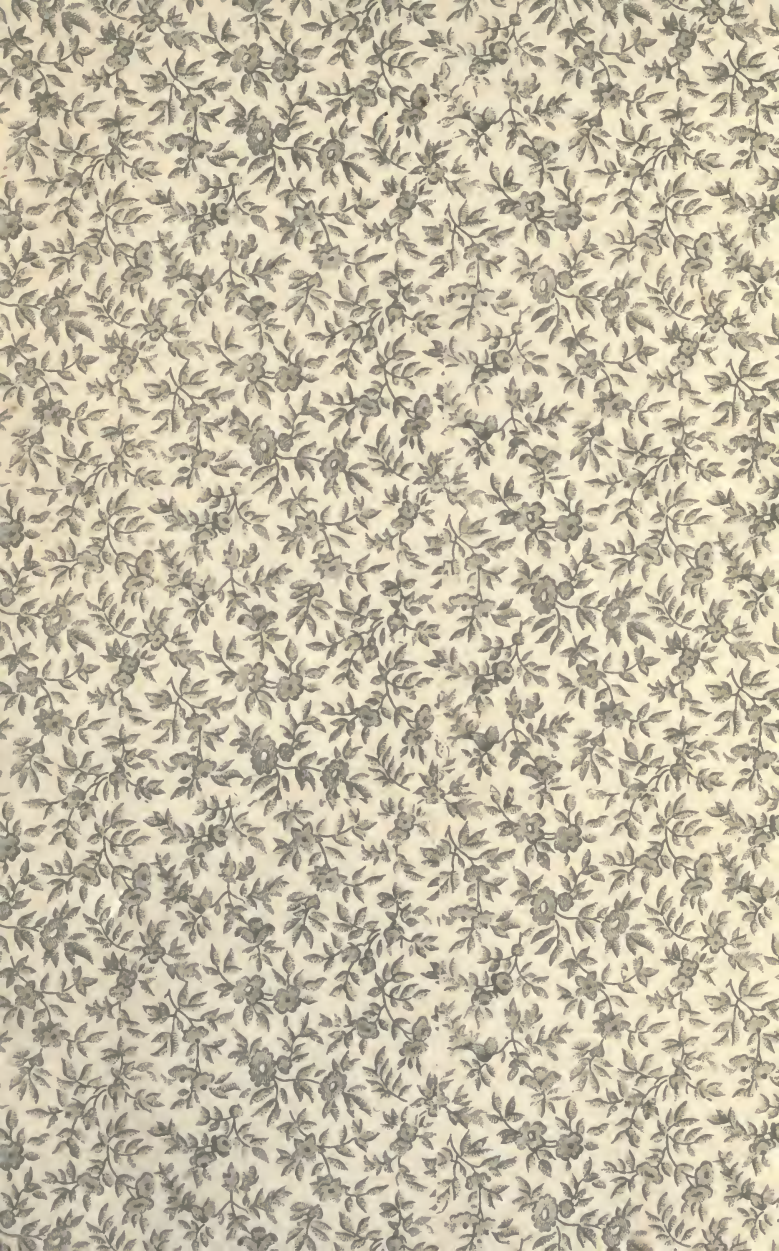




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OLDHAM

OR

BESIDE ALL WATERS

BY

LUCY ELLEN GUERNSEY

AUTHOR OF "LOVEDAY'S HISTORY," "LADY BETTY'S GOVERNESS,"
"IRISH AMY," ETC.

FOURTH EDITION.

NEW YORK
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2 AND 3 BIBLE HOUSE

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GIFT
Randall

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THIS BOOK IS AFFECTIONATELY DEDICATED
TO MY BIBLE CLASS.

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PREFACE.

I THINK this book tells its own story, such as it is. It is simply a tale of quiet country life in a New-England parish, with some of its oddities and advantages, and a little of the tragedy which is found everywhere. It is not meant specially either for old or young, though I hope both classes may find entertainment and profit in it.

One word as to the Bible-class service. I believe such neighborhood meetings would be found of the utmost advantage both in city and country parishes. In the city especially may always be found a large class of women who have been brought up to attend church regularly, but have fallen out of the habit, at first, perhaps, kept at home by the cares of young children, and afterward from indifference. Such persons may often be induced to attend a service in a neighbor's house or some such place, of an evening, when they would not go to church. My idea of such services would be, to make them "Bible-readings," in which all should be invited to take part. I do believe that a great deal of good might be done in this way.

LUCY ELLEN GUERNSEY.

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OLDHAM; OR, BESIDE ALL WATERS.

CHAPTER I.

THE RED SCHOOLHOUSE.

It was not in the least like the red schoolhouses one may see every day in the city. They are great piles of brick, usually all the uglier for the attempts at ornament bestowed upon them. They have any number of rooms for any number of grades, with A classes and B classes, and all the other machinery for grinding out scholars by the hundred, all done to one pattern. My red schoolhouse was more like the little "custom mill," built by the side of a dashing, flashing mill-stream, with trees growing about it, and a row of sheds where stand steady, sober old horses, patiently waiting while their owners sit inside, or about the mill-door, discussing politics and neighborhood news, and waiting in their turn for their separate "grists" of sweet-smelling meal and flour. There was just such a mill not far from the red schoolhouse; and the hum of the machinery could

be heard in the schoolroom when the boys and girls were particularly quiet, as was the case on the special occasion when my story begins.

There had been a talk two or three times, in school-meeting, of re-furnishing the schoolhouse on modern principles; but it had never been carried out. A long desk ran around two sides of the room, with a bench before it, where the elder scholars sat; in front of this bench was another, mostly used for recitations; and before all, a still lower seat for the little ones who were just learning their letters. The rest of the furniture consisted of the teacher's desk and chair, standing on a platform by themselves; a good serviceable blackboard, a little the worse for wear; and a map of the world, and another of the United States, which was so many States behind the times that it must needs be an old inhabitant.

There were not more than twenty scholars present that June afternoon; and those were mostly girls or very little boys, for the big boys of the district were busy with another branch of their education, — helping their fathers on the farm. All the children were seated with their faces toward the teacher, and the room was so still that the hum of the mill sounded like the drone of a big bumble-bee. Miss Armstrong was standing on the platform, her hand resting upon a book which she had apparently just laid down. She could not be called a very pretty woman, and yet there was that in her face and manner which made one look at her again. She had a certain air of peace and cheerfulness overlying steadiness and resolution, — what you would call a face to

be trusted. "She looks as if she had come through the wars, and *beat*," said Patience Fletcher, who, poor thing, had been beaten many times in her warfare.

"Now, let me hear you say that verse all together," said Miss Armstrong; "and then we will join in repeating the Lord's Prayer. I hope I shall hear every voice. Stand up, if you please."

Every voice was heard as the children repeated, in tones that were reverent from feeling, "Like as a father pitieth his own children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him." All the children joined in the repetition of the Lord's Prayer, with one exception. A thin, dark little girl, with black, crispy hair, stood looking down at her closely clasped hands with a curious movement about her lips. You would say she had much ado not to burst out crying. As the school was dismissed, and this little girl made her courtesy at the door (for this school was so far behind the times that "manners" were still taught therein), she suddenly raised her eyes, and looked her teacher in the face. Those eyes of Kit's were always a kind of surprise. They were dark violet-blue, with black level brows, and very long black lashes, — Irish blue eyes, — and had an extraordinary brilliancy about them, like precious stones or sunlit water. They now flashed upon Miss Armstrong with a look of love and thankfulness which went to the teacher's heart.

"*She* has taken in something, at any rate," thought Miss Armstrong. "I must talk more with her. I wonder why she did not join in the prayer."

Somebody else wondered also; for, the moment she was outside the door, Kit was met with the sharp question, —

“Kit Mallory, why didn’t you say the Lord’s Prayer?”

“I don’t know it,” replied Kit, coloring up to the roots of her hair; and then, after a moment, she added, as if with an effort, “Our folks don’t believe in such things.”

“You wicked girl!” exclaimed the first speaker, a pretty well grown girl of sixteen, very neatly dressed. “You wicked child, not to believe in the Lord’s Prayer!”

“I didn’t say I didn’t believe in it: I said I didn’t know it,” replied Kit with some spirit. “How can I believe in what I don’t know any thing about?”

“Well, you ought to know it, then,” said Selina. “You could have learned it if you had chosen, I know.”

Kit did not seem disposed to pursue the subject. She walked a little way down the road, climbed the bars, and was soon ascending the rocky hill-pasture.

“I declare, I don’t think that girl ought to be allowed to come to school,” said Selina. “Phin Mallory is a regular infidel, and Melissa makes all kinds of fun of religion. Kit isn’t Phin’s niece, either, though she calls him uncle. She is only a little foundling taken out of the poorhouse; Melissa told me so herself.”

“If she had been out of the orphan-asylum, it would have been all right, I suppose,” said a girl who had not yet spoken. It was now Selina’s turn

to color. Her eyes flashed, and she turned absolutely white with anger.

"For shame, Sarah!" said Faith Fletcher. "It isn't Selina's fault."

"Nor Kit's either."

"Oh, don't trouble yourself to take my part, Faith," said Selina in a voice which trembled with anger. "If Sarah" — But here she stopped; and, tying on her bonnet, she walked rapidly away in a direction opposite to that which Kit had taken.

"You are too bad, Sarah," said Faith. "Now she will go home and cry half the night."

"Why am I too bad, any more than she?" asked Sarah. "What did she say about Kit?"

"Two wrongs don't make a right," said Faith, very truly.

"And as to her crying, what is there to cry about?" continued Sarah. "I think she might be thankful that she has a good home. Nobody would ever think of her being an adopted child if she did not put on such airs. I must say I do like to take her down."

"And how do you like it when somebody takes you down?" asked Faith.

"When it happens, I will tell you," said Sarah lightly. "Where is that child? — Come, Gerty. You can't stay to play to-night: I promised to come home early, and help mother."

"And I must go home and help sister," said Faith, with a little sigh, as if the prospect were not the most alluring in the world. "Come, children. Eddy, see how you have mussed up your clean apron; and Eben has got his knees all green on the grass. What do

you think sister will say? Take hold of hands now, and walk along pretty."

The prospect of what sister would say seemed to have a very sobering effect on the little boy and girl, —twins of six years old. They at once gave up their play, and marched off in the most orderly manner. Faith followed them; and when Miss Armstrong came out of the schoolhouse, and locked the door, there was not a human being in sight. She hesitated a moment, and then took the same road that Kit had followed. She had gone about a quarter of a mile, when she stopped, and looked about her with a puzzled expression. As she did so, a light figure sprang over the stone wall, and Kit Mallory stood beside her.

"Please, Miss Armstrong, ain't you taking the wrong road?" said she as soon as she could gather breath enough to speak. "Don't you want to go to Mr. Weston's to-night?"

"To be sure I do, Kitty," answered Miss Armstrong. "I was just thinking I had made a mistake. Have I come very far out of my way?"

"Well, quite a piece," answered Kit; "but, if you don't mind going cross-lots, I could show you a shorter way than the road. Its real pretty, too, only it is kind of steep part of the way."

"I don't mind the steepness at all, and I love to go cross-lots," answered Miss Armstrong. "I am not sure that I can climb that wall quite as easily as you did, however."

"There are bars only a little way from here," said Kit: "I can take them down for you."

"How did you come to my help so opportunely, Kitty?" asked Miss Armstrong as they walked along toward the bars.

"I saw you from the hill," answered Kit as she took down the bars, and then carefully put them up again. "There is a little hollow up yonder, where I always stop to rest. It is real pretty when you get there. Now we have to go up, you see; but it isn't so steep very far."

Miss Armstrong not only saw, but felt, the steepness of the path, which taxed all her strength for a few minutes, for she was not used to mountain-climbing. Presently, however, they came to a kind of break or niche in the steep rocky ledge which crowned the hill like a rampart. The grass in this hollow was short and fine, and beautifully green; and lovely tufts of lady-fern and maiden-hair grew about the rocks. A low, wide-spreading oak-tree stood at the entrance of the nook; and a bright, clear spring, bursting to light from under the ledge, made quite a deep pool, and then prattled cheerfully away down the mountain-side. The view from the spot was lovely enough to have pleased a more cultivated eye than Kit's. The long valley, with the river and the road winding through it, was spread out like a map; and the "folded hills" rose one behind the other, till the prospect was closed by the top of a great blue mountain. Almost at their feet lay the school-house, and Bassett's mill with its flashing mill-dam. Miss Armstrong uttered an exclamation of delight.

"I'm glad you think it pretty," said Kit. "Please sit down and rest."

As she spoke she pointed out a flat rock as a desirable seat; and then, disappearing for a little, she presently came back with one hand full of young wintergreens, and the other of the last year's stems, each with its coral berry.

"I can get you a drink if you like," said she; and, searching in a hollow among the rocks, she brought out a cracked teacup, which she filled at the spring-head, and offered to Miss Armstrong.

"Thank you, my dear; this is very refreshing," said Miss Armstrong. "You have made me a nice little treat. I do not wonder you like to stop here."

"I think it is pleasant," said Kit: "you can see so far, and the colors are so nice. Folks say red houses are ugly and old-fashioned, but somehow the red schoolhouse and mill seem just to fit in—I don't know how to say what I mean."

"I understand you," said Miss Armstrong. "They do just exactly fit in, as you say. You have an eye for color, Kitty."

"I love colors, I know that," said Kit; and then, her face darkening as if with an unpleasant recollection, "Melissa says I am a fool because I love flowers, and because I am always picking up stones and snail-shells. She threw away all my pretty stones that I got up on the mountain, but I'll be even with her some day."

"You should not speak like that," said Miss Armstrong gently. "Don't you know that it is wrong to wish for revenge?"

"Is it?" asked Kit.

"Yes, my dear. Do you never read the Bible?"

"I never saw only the outside of one," answered Kit. "Uncle Phin won't have one in the house. He says all pious people are humbugs, and that it was religion that made aunt Martha crazy."

"Is your aunt crazy?" asked Miss Armstrong.

"Yes, ma'am. She isn't raving crazy all the time; but she just sits still in her chair, and takes no notice of any thing. Sometimes she would not eat any thing for days together if Symantha or uncle Phin did not coax her. They are real good to her, but Melissa hasn't a mite of patience with her."

"And would you like to read the Bible, Kitty?"

"Yes, ma'am, if there are nice stories in it," answered Kit doubtfully. "I love stories."

"And so do I," said Miss Armstrong. "Yes, there are plenty of beautiful stories in the Bible. But that is not the reason we love it: it is because the Bible is God's word,—his letter or message to us, to teach us about him. If you had a kind friend out in California, and he should write you a letter saying he had a delightful home all ready for you, and telling you what you must do in order to come to that home, you would think a great deal of that letter, wouldn't you? You would want to read it over and over, and learn all it had to tell you."

"I guess I would!" said Kit with emphasis. "I would learn it off by heart, and think about it all the time."

"Well, the Bible is very much such a letter to us. In it our Heavenly Father tells us about Himself, and all He has done for us, and especially how He sent His Son to take our nature upon Him, and die

for us on the cross, and then to rise from the dead, and go into heaven to make ready a place for those who love Him."

Kit looked puzzled for a moment, and then her eyes lighted up.

"I believe I read about Him in the 'Pilgrim's Progress,'" said she. "Isn't He the Lord that it tells about?"

"Yes," answered Miss Armstrong. "So you have read the 'Pilgrim's Progress'?"

"Not all of it. I found an old, torn book of it up in the garret when we came here; and it was a story, so I read it. Uncle Phin said it was all a heap of nonsense, like 'Bluebeard' and 'Jack the Giant-Killer;' but it always did seem to me more than that. So there really is such a person?"

Miss Armstrong looked at the child for a moment in amazement. With all her experience, she found it hard to realize that here, in the midst of a Christian community, was a child of twelve who could ask such a question. Kit did not understand the teacher's glance, and took it for one of displeasure.

"I don't know any thing, hardly," she said humbly, "only to read and write a little. Where we lived out West, there was hardly ever any church or meeting, and we only had school three or four months in the year. When we came here, Miss Celia Claxton called, and asked uncle Phin to let me come to Sunday school; but he wouldn't: and he talked so to her she has never been near us since. He says religion is all priestcraft and lies, and that nobody really believes in it."

"That is a great mistake, and one that I fear he will be very sorry for some day," said Miss Armstrong. "Kitty, my dear child, before I go, I want to teach you a verse out of the Bible. Listen, and say it after me."

It was with a very serious face that Kit repeated after her friend, "God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." One or two repetitions enabled her to say the verse perfectly. Then Miss Armstrong took out of her pocket a pretty little card, on which was printed that time-honored and always beautiful prayer which begins, —

"Now I lay me down to sleep,"

and also a verse for the morning.

"I will give you this for your own," said she. "Learn these verses, and say them night and morning. But, Kitty, if you want your Heavenly Father to give you any thing else, you can ask Him in your own words. He will always hear you if you ask for the sake of Jesus Christ our Lord."

"And will He always give it to me?" asked Kit eagerly.

"Yes, if it is best for you to have it. But He knows better than we do what is good for us; and, when we ask for what we ought not to have, He does not give it."

"I see," said Kit thoughtfully. "Just as if a baby should want a sharp knife: its mother would not let it have the knife, if the baby cried ever so hard."

"I see you understand me, my dear. Now we must walk on, or we shall be late.

"Have you always lived with your uncle, Kitty?" asked Miss Armstrong as they walked down the hill.

"No, ma'am. Melissa says uncle took me out of the poorhouse; but I don't believe it," said Kit in a confidential tone. "I remember a place that was not a bit like the poorhouse."

"What was it like?" asked Miss Armstrong.

Kit stopped for an instant, seeming to send her thoughts inward. "It was a room with a bright carpet on the floor," said she. "I used to sit on the floor, and run my fingers over the figures. And there were plants, like Miss Claxton's, and a big bird. That is all I can remember when I am awake. Sometimes I dream about another place where I have been, but I can't tell what it is like. And it doesn't seem to me as if my name was Keturah, either."

"Perhaps it was Catherine," suggested Miss Armstrong.

"I can't tell," said Kit, knitting her brows. "It doesn't seem as if that was it exactly. I asked Symantha one day; but she hushed me up, and told me never to talk about it, because uncle Phin would be very angry if he knew. But I think about it a great deal," concluded Kit with a kind of triumph in her tone. "They can't keep me from thinking."

"Here is Mr. Weston now," said Miss Armstrong as they came out of the pasture into the lane which led out to the road beside a great barn.

"Well, I declare! I was just going to hitch up,

and go after you," said Mr. Weston. "You staid so long, I thought you must be lost."

"That is exactly what happened to me," replied Miss Armstrong. "I stupidly took the wrong turn coming out of the schoolhouse; and I don't know where I should have been by this time if Kitty had not come to my rescue, and brought me over the hill. We should have been here long before, only that we sat down for a rest and a chat."

"Did you put up the bars, Kit?" asked Mr. Weston.

"Yes, sir, I always do when I take them down; but I generally climb over," answered Kit. "I must be going," she added with an effort. "Symantha will want me."

"Wait a minute," said Mr. Weston. He went into the barn as he spoke, and came back with a basketful of June russet apples.

"There! you don't see many such apples this time of year," said he.

"Oh, thank you!" said Kit gratefully. "Aunt Martha will eat an apple sometimes when she won't touch any thing else."

"That child has hard times, I am afraid," said Mr. Weston, as Kit disappeared behind the barn. "But what has become of Selina?"

"I have not seen her at all," replied Miss Armstrong. "I supposed she came directly home."

"Here she is now. — Why, Selina! how was it you did not wait for Miss Armstrong?"

"I forgot," answered Selina, coloring; "and when I went back she was gone."

“Your wits were wool-gathering, as usual, I guess,” said Mr. Weston. “Only for Kit Mallory, Miss Armstrong might have been halfway to Oldbury by this time. However, all’s well that ends well. Run into the house now, and help ma. Aunt Betsy Burr and Miss Claxton have just come in, and will stay to tea.”

“Just my luck, exactly,” said Selina to herself. “Somebody always gets my chance. I wanted to walk home with Miss Armstrong, and have a nice talk with her; and now she will think me a perfect fool. It is all Sarah Leet’s fault, putting every thing out of my head. And now Aunt Betsy has come, and no one else will have a chance to put in a word. It is too bad!”

CHAPTER II.

NEIGHBORHOOD NEWS.

"WELL," said Aunt Betsy as she finished buttering her biscuit, and began stirring up her tea, "well, and how do you like your school?"

"Very well, so far," answered Miss Armstrong; "but these are early times, you know."

"Yes, I know," said Aunt Betsy, with a solemn shake of the head. "New brooms sweep clean. There was Malvina Spencer: she was going to do great things, but she almost broke up the school with her nonsense. And there was that Miss O'Hara. But what could any one expect of *her*?" added Aunt Betsy with scornful emphasis. "Any one might have known how it would turn out."

"Yes, it was easy to see how it would turn out," said Mr. Weston dryly. "So long as so many were prejudiced against her beforehand, and determined not to see any good in her, whatever she did, it was no great wonder she failed."

"Why were they prejudiced against her?" asked Miss Armstrong. "She had a pretty name in her favor, and a distinguished one, if that is any thing."

"Pretty, indeed!" said Aunt Betsy with a sniff.

“Why, her father was an Irishman, — just a regular Irishman, — who came here, and hired out to old Judge Davis down at the cross-roads. No, it was to Abner Davis, up at the Corners, he went first, come to think. When he had saved a little money, he bought the Mudge place, and mended up the old house so it was quite smart. But he was a regular Irishman, for all that, and came from Ireland, for I heard him say so ; and he said he wasn’t ashamed of it, that’s more !” And Aunt Betsy looked triumphantly at her host, as if to defy him to dispute her position.

“He was a Protestant, and very regular at church and communion ; and he was a clever man, too,” said Mr. Weston, using the word “clever” in its New-England sense. “I remember how he used to do your chores for you, Aunt Betsy, when Uncle Jonathan had the fever.”

Aunt Betsy became suddenly busy with her tea.

“But what had the fact of Miss O’Hara’s being Irish to do with her success in the school ?” asked Miss Armstrong.

“Well, you see, it rather set people against her,” answered Miss Celia, a mild elderly lady, who had not yet spoken. “We think a great deal of descent in these parts, Miss Armstrong ; and though I had nothing against Miss O’Hara myself, — indeed, I always thought her a very nice girl, — yet it did *not* seem as if she were a fit person to be set over children whose ancestors are buried all over Oldfield County, — the daughter of a new-come-over Irishman.”

"According to that, our first teachers in this country must all have been very unsuitable persons," said Mrs. Weston. "They were all new-come-over then, you know."

"To be sure," said Miss Celia. "Really, cousin Abby, I don't know that I ever looked upon it in that light. Certainly, we were all new-come-over once, — at least, our ancestors were, unless they were Indians like old Abner Kettle."

"Indians, indeed! I wonder at you, Celia Claxton," said Aunt Betsy indignantly. "You, whose grandfathers and great-grandfathers are buried in this very graveyard, to compare yourself to old Abner Kettle, whose daughter married a Feejee Islander or something like that! But, as to the school, I am glad Miss Armstrong likes it; though these are new times, as I said. There are some dreadful wild girls in the district. There's" —

"Excuse me, Aunt Betsy; but suppose we leave Miss Armstrong to find out for herself," interposed Mr. Weston. "What is this I hear about the stone house? It seems we are to have new neighbors before long."

Aunt Betsy tossed her head, but the bait was too tempting not to be taken.

"Why, yes, haven't you heard? Of course you know all about it, Celia. You have a right if any one has; for that place ought to belong to you and Delia, if every one had their dues."

"We have never laid the least claim to it," said Miss Celia calmly. "Richard Van Zandt was only a very distant relation, and we had no expectations whatever from him."

"Not in *that* line, perhaps," said Aunt Betsy with an ill-natured laugh. Miss Celia's fair old face flushed a little, but she took no notice of the remark. "Anyhow, Dick was your mother's own second cousin, if you call that very distant. I don't."

"It is not very near, at any rate," said Miss Celia. "We were always friendly with Richard, but we saw nothing of him for many years. His sister-in-law, Mrs. Barbara Van Zandt, was very kind to him, and he died at her house; so it is no wonder he left his property to her. Delia and myself would hardly have known what to do with such a house. It would have been a great trouble to us."

"You would have known what to do with the money, though."

"We have enough," said Miss Celia with dignity, "and that is as good as a feast."

"I don't suppose there was much money in the case," observed Mr. Weston. "Dick Van Zandt was never rich, and he was one who gave away with both hands whatever he had. I understand from Squire Davis that the place was left to Mrs. Van Zandt, who is very wealthy, on condition that it should be kept up, and that some member of the family should now and then spend a summer there."

"Yes: the old lady and two or three of her nieces or grand-nieces are coming pretty soon, so Aunt Aggy told me," said Mrs. Weston. "I was up there yesterday, and found her sweeping and clearing up at a great rate. She took me through the house, and it was quite a wonder to see the order it was in. I would

not have believed it had stood empty so long. Even the carpets looked as good as new."

"The house was handsomely furnished, to begin with. And was Aggy pleased with the prospect?" asked Miss Celia, much interested.

"Oh, yes! She says she and Mrs. Van Zandt were girls together."

"Mrs. Van Zandt's father was a Butler, I know; but her mother was a Bogardus, and connected with all the Dutch folks over there in Rockvale," said Aunt Betsy, who was very strong in the matter of genealogy.

"I have heard that Mrs. Van Zandt is a very nice lady," observed Mrs. Weston.

"She is," said Miss Armstrong. "I know her well. And I am glad she is coming here: she is a blessing wherever she goes."

"Do tell!" exclaimed Aunt Betsy. "Real liberal with her money, I expect."

"Yes, and better than that, — very kind and judicious with it."

"She won't have very nice neighbors on one side, at any rate," said Aunt Betsy. "I shouldn't like to live next to those Mallorys."

"I don't suppose they will trouble her very much, unless the poor woman gets one of her screaming fits," said Miss Celia. "Is it true that the little girl — Kitty, or whatever her name is — comes to school, Miss Armstrong?"

"Yes, she was at school to-day; and a very bright, interesting child she seems."

"Well, I don't think it ought to be allowed," said Aunt Betsy: "her folks are regular infidels."

"So she tells me."

"She doesn't know the Lord's Prayer: she said so to-day," observed Selina. "She said her folks didn't believe in such things."

"Just so. Who knows what mischief the children may learn of her?"

"I do not think there is much danger in that direction," said Miss Armstrong. "From what little talk I had with her to-day, I should say Kitty is rather a heathen than an unbeliever: she is as ignorant of the Christian religion as any little South-sea Islander. But she seemed much interested in what I told her. It would be a great pity to deprive her of any chance, when she has so few. How does it happen that a family like the Mallorys should be found in such a place as this?"

"Well, as to that, you know there are heathen everywhere," replied Mr. Weston. "Tom Mallory, the grandfather, was a great disciple and admirer of Tom Paine. Phin was always a wild fellow. But the women of the family were communicants of the Church, and old Tom never interfered with them; he said religion was a safe plaything for women. And, to do him justice, he was really kind to his daughter-in-law and her boy, for Phin's father was killed before he was born. Phin went away West, and nobody heard any thing about him till he came back and took possession of the place last fall, when the old man died. There was another grandson, who was a favorite with old Tom, and some say the farm was left to him; but he has never turned up, and Phin says he died out West."

"Maybe Phin murdered him, to get the property," said Aunt Betsy. "Who knows?"

"Nobody knows, and therefore we won't suppose so," said Mr. Weston somewhat sharply. "He and Phin were always good friends. I always supposed Kit was his child, but Phin says she is not related to them at all. He says Symantha took a fancy to her, and adopted her."

"Yes, that is very likely, that she would go adopting a child," said Aunt Betsy. "Depend upon it, there's more than that about it."

"Melissa says they took her out of the poor-house," said Selina.

"I wouldn't have much to say to Melissa if I were you," observed Mrs. Weston. "Well, ladies, if you have finished your tea, we will go into the other room, where it is cooler. — You may clear the table, and put away the things, Selina; and I will help you with the dishes by and by."

"Yes, that is always the way," muttered Selina: "always something to remind me that I am not one of the family." It did not occur to Selina, that, if she had been one of the family, the same work would naturally have fallen to her share. She had lately taken to looking out for affronts; and affronts are like the spooks of the old Dutch proverb, — those who go to look for them can always find them.

"You are going to have other neighbors this summer," remarked Miss Celia as she took out her company knitting, a child's fine white stocking. "The Richmonds are coming back to Mrs. Gleason's."

Mr. and Mrs. Weston exchanged looks which were

not by any means expressive of joy. "I thought they said last summer they would not come again," said Mrs. Weston.

"It seems they have changed their minds; for Agnes Gleason told me she had just taken from the office a letter from Miss Amelia Richmond, in which she announced her mother's intention of passing the summer months in this neighborhood, and entering into negotiations for Mrs. Gleason's rooms. I confess I was sorry to hear it. I do not consider the influence of that family a very desirable one in this neighborhood."

"I quite agree with you, cousin Celia," said Mrs. Weston. "I am sorry they are coming back. I do not think the rush of summer boarders we have had of late years has been any special advantage, as you say."

"They bring a deal of money with them, if that is all," said Aunt Betsy, clicking her needles in a very different style from Miss Celia's rapid, noiseless manner of working.

"That is not quite all."

"And I don't think they have done Agnes Gleason any harm," continued Aunt Betsy: "she perfectly hates Milly Richmond."

"It is not very good for us to perfectly hate people," said Mrs. Weston, smiling. "I hope Mrs. Van Zandt's family will not be like the Richmonds."

"'Tain't likely we shall have a chance to see what they are like," said Aunt Betsy. "I hear they hold their heads very high. The pride of those Dutch folks in their families is perfectly ridiculous."

"For the matter of that, we think a good deal of our families in these parts," said Mrs. Weston, smiling.

"That is different," returned Aunt Betsy.

"From what I know of Mrs. Van Zandt and her nieces, I venture to predict that you will see them in Sunday school the very first Sunday," said Miss Armstrong.

"Then I think they might just as well wait till they are asked," retorted Aunt Betsy. "We don't want city folks poking in their noses, and finding fault with their betters, and with folks old enough to be their mothers;" all of which Aunt Betsy delivered with a vengeful rattle of her knitting-needles, and a glance at Miss Armstrong which seemed to include her in the number of obnoxious "city folks."

"Mrs. Van Zandt is a Christian woman, then?" asked Miss Celia.

"That she is, and a very excellent and energetic one," answered Miss Armstrong. "It is the delight of her life to fit up boxes for missionaries and their families. I have known her to buy four or five dozen each of napkins, towels, sheets, and so forth, have them all hemmed by hand by some poor old ladies she knows (for she has never become reconciled to machine work), and within a month send them all to different missionaries' wives in the West and South, or in the city. My only wonder is, that she can make up her mind to remove so far from her beloved shops."

"Well, I didn't suppose there were many people of that kind in New York," said Aunt Betsy. "I sup-

posed they were all given up to dress and fashion and frivolity."

"There are as many good Christian people in New York as in any place in the world," said Miss Armstrong with some emphasis. "Why, Mrs. Burr, who do you suppose keeps up and manages all the charities, — the hospitals, and missions, and schools, and orphan-asylums, and nurseries, and all the rest?"

Not having any answer at hand, Aunt Betsy took a pinch of snuff, — a practice not desirable in itself, but a convenience in such cases.

"I am glad to hear such an account of Mrs. Van Zandt," said Miss Celia, busily binding off her heel. "I felt disposed to like her, from what I heard of her kindness to Richard Van Zandt in his last days. But does not Mrs. Van Zandt work at all, herself?"

"She hems napkins, and knits," replied Miss Armstrong. "I should say she must use up a hundred weight or so of wool every year, in one way or another."

"That is a great deal, almost two pounds a week," said Miss Celia, who took every thing literally. "To be sure, she may use double wool."

"Double, treble, and single, and every other kind. She is sure to wish to convert you to the Welsh fashion of shaping heels, Miss Celia."

"There I *cannot* agree with her," said Miss Celia with emphasis, and yet with a little apology in her tone, as if she felt it a liberty to disagree even with an unknown Mrs. Van Zandt. "I do *not* like the Welsh heel: it is much harder to run and to mend, and it wears no better."

"I wonder what has become of Selina," said Mrs. Weston, rising. She went into the wide, airy kitchen, which served as a dining-room in summer, and found Selina just finishing the last of the dishes.

"Why, my dear, you need not have washed the dishes," said she. "I told you to put them together and leave them, and I would help you."

"Oh, I could do them well enough: it is the hired girl's place, I suppose," said Selina in a voice which trembled in spite of her.

Mrs. Weston took no notice of this speech for the present. When the company was gone, and family prayers were over, — a custom never omitted in the family in the busiest season, — she followed Selina to her own neat, pretty room.

"Selina," said she gravely, "you have two or three times lately used the expression 'hired girl.' I want to know what you mean by it."

Selina was already growing ashamed of her ill humor. Perhaps it would be more correct to say she was growing tired of it, more especially as its exercise had deprived her of the pleasure of hearing the remainder of Aunt Betsy's news. She twisted her handkerchief, and answered in a somewhat embarrassed tone, —

"Oh, well, every one knows what a hired girl is."

"A hired girl, as I understand it, is a woman who works for money in a place which is not her home. It is a very useful calling, and, when faithfully fulfilled, worthy of the highest respect," said Mrs. Weston, who had been a "school-ma'am" herself, and was habitually choice in her use of words. "Is

that your condition? Do you work for wages? and are you in a strange family?"

"No, mother," answered Selina in a low tone. Her better self was getting the upper hand, but she was not quite ready to give way.

"Do you think you have more work put upon you than usually falls to the eldest daughter? more than Agnes Gleason, for instance?"

"I don't have so much to do as Agnes," replied Selina frankly. "She never gets to school before half-past nine when the Richmonds are staying there."

"And do you think that the things provided for you are given you as wages? Is this room, for instance, such as people usually give to servants?"

"No, mother," replied Selina. She paused a moment, and then added frankly, "I was cross, I suppose. Something happened at school which put me out."

"And so you came home and revenged that annoyance on me by saying something untrue to hurt my feelings. Was that right?"

"No, mother. But I did not think it was as bad as that. I am a wicked girl, and I always shall be," said Selina, bursting into tears. "I wish I had never been born."

"You will not mend matters by looking at them in that way," said Mrs. Weston. "A little sober, honest self-examination and repentance will do you more good than any amount of that sort of passion." She paused a moment, and then added very seriously, —

"Selina, Mr. Weston and myself have treated you

as a dear daughter ever since you came to us. We have tried our best to make you happy and good. But for the last year you have made us both very uncomfortable."

"I don't see how," murmured Selina.

"You can see well enough if you choose," replied Mrs. Weston. "Your father is very much displeased with you; and though we shall never cast you off, more than if you were our own, I fear, unless you turn over a new leaf, we shall have to make some different arrangement. My dear girl, why won't you trust your best friends, and try to be what they would have you?"

Selina sobbed that she was very sorry; and Mrs. Weston, thinking she had said enough, kissed her good-night, and left her. Selina, left alone, cried for some time longer, told herself how hard it was to be an orphan cast on the cold charities of the world, and shed a great many tears, as she imagined to the memory of the mother she had never seen. Then, growing tired of this mood, she said to herself that no doubt Mr. and Mrs. Weston meant to be kind to her in their way, and that it was her duty to be grateful. She would show that she was so, by being amiable and affectionate, and bearing the trials of her lot patiently. If her own dear mother had lived, it would have been very different; but, as it was, she must be resigned. And, feeling by this time very virtuous indeed, she went to bed.

CHAPTER III.

KIT AT HOME.

KIT MALLORY went swiftly over the high pasture till she reached the little spring ; and then, taking an oblique direction, she descended till she came to an old wooden house standing on the lowest ridge or terrace of the hill. It had once been a roomy, comfortable farmhouse, with a well-house, sheds, and barns ; but the buildings were out of repair, and the whole place looked as if it had suffered from a long course of neglect. Nevertheless, the stones at the back-door were white and clean, and the windows bright ; and a row of milk-pans turned up on a shelf showed that some one in the house was neat and pains-taking. The back-door stood open ; and, as Kit approached, a middle-aged woman appeared in it, making a sign for silence. She was tall and dark, and would have been handsome but for the look of hopeless weariness and despondency which had settled on her face.

“Is aunt Martha bad again?” asked Kit in a whisper.

“Yes, I have had a terrible time with her all the afternoon. She has just dropped asleep, and I hope

she will not wake for a good long while. What kept you so late?"

Kit gave a short account of herself.

"That was all right," said Symantha. "Is Miss Armstrong a nice lady?"

"She is just lovely!" answered Kit with enthusiasm.

"I hope she will be a good friend to you. You must try to learn all you can, and make the most of your time while we are here."

"Ain't we going to stay here, then?" asked Kit in a tone of anxiety and disappointment. "I thought uncle Phin owned this place."

"So he does — at least — yes, I suppose he does," answered Symantha with a curious tone of hesitation, which made Kit look at her in surprise. "But I have moved so many times, and about every time for the worse, that I don't believe I shall ever feel settled any where. What nice apples!" she added, as if hastening to change the conversation. "Where did you get them?"

"Mr. Weston gave them to me, and I brought them home for aunt Martha. Where are all the folks?"

"Pa 'has gone over to Oldbury after a load of lumber. And Melissa is down at the Corners, I suppose: I haven't seen her since morning. She always goes away if she can, you know, when ma gets one of her bad times; and perhaps it is just as well."

"How tired you look!" said Kit. She hesitated a moment; and then, postponing a plan she had meant to put in execution as soon as she reached home, she added, "You lie down and rest, and let me get the supper. I can do it as well as not."

"Well, you may if you like," replied Symantha. "You are a good little thing, Kit. I don't know what I should do without you sometimes." As she spoke her face softened; and she bent down and kissed Kit, who returned the embrace with interest.

"I'm sure I don't know what I should do without you," said she. "If it wasn't for you, I'd run away and seek my fortune."

"Hush," said Symantha sharply. "Don't ever let father hear you say such a thing as that: I don't know what he would do to you. Yes, you may get the supper ready, and I will rest till milking-time."

Left to herself, Kit went about her work, doing every thing with marvellous quickness and quietness. Just as she had finished her preparations, she heard the sound of wheels and horses' feet; and presently a man entered the back kitchen. Kit made a sign for silence.

"Where's Symantha?" was the first question.

"She's lying down. Please don't make such a noise, uncle Phin: aunt Martha has just gone to sleep."

"Has she had a bad time?"

Kit nodded.

"Where's Melissa?"

"I don't know; I haven't seen her. Symantha says she has gone to the Corners."

"I'll teach her to run off and leave all the work for her sister," muttered Phin Mallory to himself; and then aloud, "Here, child, here's a reader and spelling-book for you. Halloo, what's that?"

"A picture-paper, I guess," said Kit; "and a

little book," she added, taking out of the parcel an illustrated Sunday-school paper, and a copy of that time-honored tract, "The Shepherd of Salisbury Plain," with a pretty woodcut on the cover. Mr. Sandford at Oldbury was fond of this method of sowing seed, and seldom sold a book or parcel of books without putting in some similar document to that which Kit held in her hand.

"What stuff is that?" said Phin. "I'll teach old Sandford to be sending his rubbish into my house." He made a step toward the stove as he spoke, as if to throw the papers into the fire.

"Oh, please don't burn them up," entreated Kit, holding his hand. "I don't hardly ever see a picture, and these are so pretty. Please let me have them."

Phin still held the papers over the fire; but something in the pleading, upturned face seemed to move him, for he put them into her hand.

"Here, child, take them, then. You don't see many pretty things, that's a fact. There, put the supper on the table; I'll be back in a minute."

Kit carried her prizes off in triumph to her own little room up stairs, and hid them away till she should have leisure to examine them. Then she hastened to finish her supper preparations, and had a comfortable meal ready on the table when Phin returned. He was a lithe, alert little man, looking as if he had seen some hard times and some dissipation; and there was a watchful, furtive expression in his face, not pleasant to see.

"So you got beat out," said he to Symantha, as

she appeared and took her seat at the table. "It was too bad in Melissa to run off and leave you with all the work. I'll tell her what I think about it when she comes home."

"She is just as well out of the way when ma has one of her bad times," replied Symantha. "But I don't see how any one can like to go visiting so, forever. I like to let other folks alone, and have them let me alone."

"Yes, you and pa would like to shut me up from one year's end to another," said Melissa, speaking for herself, as she came into the room with her hat on. "It has always been just so. But I'm not going to stand it. I like company, and I'm going to have it, so there!—Kit, take my things up stairs, and get me a chair."

"Sit still, Kit," said her father. "You just wait on yourself, my girl. Kit has been at work while you have been at play."

Melissa muttered something, but it seemed as if she did not care to provoke a dispute. She threw her hat and shawl into a corner, and took a seat at the table.

"We're going to have new neighbors at the stone house," said she after a little silence, "some people from New York, — Van Zandt, or some such name."

"It was a Van Zandt that owned it before," remarked Symantha.

"Yes; he has left it to some old lady in New York, and she is going to have it all fixed up for a summer house. She has got no end of money, and is going to bring her horses and servants and car-

riages, and some young ladies, from New York ; so we shall have quite a gay time."

"I don't see how *we* shall have much to do with it," said Symantha. "I don't suppose you mean to go and call on them, do you?"

"Why not?" asked Melissa. "I should just like to know."

"Because I say you sha'n't, and that's enough!" exclaimed her father, striking the table with his hand so as to make all the dishes rattle. "I won't have you go near them, do you hear? not one of them. You mind me, too, Kit: don't you go near the house."

"Don't, pa ; you will wake mother," said Symantha.

"Dear me, what a fuss about nothing!" said Melissa. "One would think pa thought these people had the small-pox, or that he was afraid they would find out something."

Phin gave his daughter such a menacing glance that she evidently thought it better to say no more, and the meal was finished in silence. Kit washed the dishes, brought in wood, and arranged matters for the next morning. By that time it was dark, and she was weary enough to go to bed. Tired as she was, she did not forget to take out the card Miss Armstrong had given her, and read over the little prayer. She stood for a moment after she had finished, as if thinking, and then said, half aloud, —

"Please, our Father in heaven, I should like to have a Bible." Then she crept into bed, and was asleep in a minute.

The next morning Kit was up early, so early that the sun was only just gilding the very top of Blue Mountain. Nobody else was stirring in the house. It was a good time to put her plan into execution.

There was a large, high garret to the old house, in which was stored the accumulated rubbish of a hundred years. Here was a tall eight-day clock, the case of which would have thrown a collector into ecstasies, side by side with a broken and disused loom; there, a shelf full of bottles and more or less disabled crockery. A little room was roughly partitioned off at one end, and made a famous playing-place on a rainy day. It was in this garret that Kit had found her precious fragment of the "Pilgrim's Progress" lying on the top of a box full of old books and papers. It had occurred to her that in this same box she might possibly find a Bible.

She took out the volumes one by one, and looked at the titles. They were mostly old books of theology and collections of sermons; but there were two or three volumes of travels and memoirs, which looked, Kit thought, as though they might be interesting, and she laid them aside for future consideration. At last, near the bottom of the box, she found a small volume handsomely bound and closely printed. She looked at the titlepage.

"The New Testament of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." Was that the same as the Bible? Kit thought so, but she was not sure.

"I'll take it to school, and show it to Miss Armstrong. Anyhow, it tells about *Him*. What is this, I wonder? Never mind, I can't look at it now."

Kit brushed the dust from her dress, washed her face and hands, and sat down to examine her new treasure. The first chapter seemed to be all hard names, so she opened about the middle of the book, and read about the shepherds who were watching their flocks by night, and were sent by the angels to find the babe lying in the manger, who was Christ the Lord. She read slowly, and had to spell some words; but the story lost nothing of its force by that.

"The very one Miss Armstrong was talking about," said Kit. "How strange! If he was a little baby once, and grew up into a man afterward, there must have been a time when he was just as old as I am now."

Kit had no time to follow out her meditations. A call from below summoned her.

"You can't go to school to-day," was the salutation which met her as she entered the kitchen. "Symantha's sick, or thinks she is, and I want you to help me."

"Oh, dear! and I did want to go so much!" said Kit. "Can't you do without me, Melissa? I hate to be so irregular."

"Let her go, Melissa," said Symantha's voice from the little bedroom. "I sha'n't want any thing. I dare say I shall be able to get up presently; it is only one of my dizzy headaches."

"Yes, that is very likely, — that she is going to school, leaving me with you and ma to wait on, and all the work to do. I don't believe pa will let her go, anyway, when he finds out about Miss Armstrong.

They say she is a regular Methodist, has prayers in school, and teaches the children out of the Bible. I mean to tell pa about it; and then he won't let you go at all, Miss Kit, and serve you right too."

Kit was used to Melissa's tongue, and generally gave her back her sharp words with interest; but the prospect of losing her precious schooling and the society of her new friend was too dreadful, and she burst into tears.

"Hush, Kit; don't cry," said Symantha, raising her head, but obliged to drop it again. "Pa won't take you out of school. Oh, my head!"

"Is it so very bad?" asked Kit, forgetting her own trouble for the moment. "Can't I do any thing for you?"

"You may look in the front-room cupboard, and see if you can find the alcohol bottle," said Symantha, pressing her hand over her eyes. "I had it up there, I know."

Kit sped up stairs, and found the bottle. As she passed the door of her own little room, she remembered her prayer of last night, and also that she had forgotten her promise to say one in the morning.

"What a shame!" she said to herself. "And when He was so good, and gave me the Testament." She went into her room, shut the door, and reverently repeated her little verse, —

"Gentle Jesus, meek and mild,
Look upon a little child;
Pity my simplicity;
Suffer me to come to Thee."

“Jesus! That is the very one I was reading about, — that very one that was a little baby. I wonder if *He* ever had to do things he didn’t like. Perhaps *He* had to stay at home sometimes to help His mother, but I don’t believe she was one bit like Melissa. But they were poor, I guess, and *He* must have had a great deal of trouble in His life; so *He* knows all about it. Perhaps *He* would like it if I was good-natured, and staid at home.” Kit had not been gone ten minutes when she came back with the bottle, and set herself to bathe Symantha’s head and brush her hair; but in that ten minutes a great change had come over her. She had entered into a new life. The little untaught, ignorant heathen had found her Saviour, had entered into conscious relations with Him, and made a sacrifice for Him. The little seed dropped by a skilful sower into her heart had taken root and sprung up. The plant was young and tender as yet, one would say, easily crushed by a careless foot, or nibbled off by some passing animal; but *ONE* was watching over it who is greater than all the changes and chances of this mortal life, and who makes them all work together for good to them that love Him.

Kit said no more about going to school. She went into her aunt’s room, washed her face and hands, and coaxed her to drink a cup of coffee and eat a bit of toast. Mrs. Mallory must once have been a beautiful woman, judging by her regular features and still fair complexion; but her hair was streaked with gray, her large dark-blue eyes, very much like Kit’s in shape and color, were wild and wandering, and

she had a despairing, anxious expression, pitiful to see.

"There, that is real good," said Kit, speaking as one would to a sick and wayward child. "Now you shall have a nice apple."

She produced one of the apples she had brought from Mr. Weston's, and the poor woman took it with some show of pleasure. Something about Kit seemed to arrest her attention, for she held the child's hand, and looked earnestly into her face.

"Who are you, little girl? Haven't I seen you somewhere?"

"Why, yes, aunt Martha. I am Kit. You remember Kit, don't you?"

Mrs. Mallory gazed at her a moment with a gleam of intelligence, and then, dropping her hand, sank back on her pillow.

"I don't know," said she. "It all goes away from me. Every thing went when they took Him away."

"Well, never mind," said Kit soothingly. "Eat the nice apple, and by and by you shall have another."

Seeing her aunt's attention diverted for the moment, Kit slipped from the room. Melissa was by this time in a better humor. Her moods were very much the result of her bodily feelings; and she felt better, now that she had made her coffee as strong as she liked it, and eaten her breakfast. Kit waited on Symantha, and brushed her hair softly till she fell asleep; got her aunt up and dressed her, and brought her some flowers from the neglected garden. The last Mrs. Mallory had been fond of flowers, and a

few of the hardy perennials she had planted still struggled for existence ; while in one corner the dear old-fashioned rose of May, neglected and forgotten now, opened its pretty pointed buds. Mrs. Mallory loved flowers, and a nosegay would keep her quiet and amused longer than any thing else. Certainly Kit did her full share of the work, and more ; for Melissa was an accomplished *shirk*, and, if she did not work herself, she was the cause of work in others. Symantha's nap carried off her headache, and she was able to get up to dinner.

"Halloo, what are you doing here?" asked Phin as he came in and found Kit dishing up the dinner. "I thought you took your dinner to school."

"I didn't go to school," answered Kit, busily stirring her gravy. "I staid at home to help Melissa."

"Then don't do it again, do you hear?" said her uncle angrily. "I am not going to have you staying out of school for every little thing."

"I didn't want to stay, I'm sure," returned Kit ; and then, as some thought crossed her mind, she added in a gentler tone, "Symantha couldn't sit up, and Melissa wanted me to help her, so I did."

"It wasn't her fault," added Symantha : "Melissa kept her. Kit was very good-natured about it, I must say."

"Good-natured or not, it isn't to happen again. — Do you hear, Melissa?"

"Hear what?" asked Melissa from the next room. "I don't know what you are talking about."

"Then I'll make you know," said her father. "I say you are not to keep the child at home from school

for any thing and every thing. I want her to go every day this summer. I've taught school myself, and I know what a nuisance it is to a teacher to have scholars so irregular. Mind, I won't have it happen again."

"Oh, of course you won't," replied Melissa sulkily: "you care for every one more than you do for me. Never mind, I am not going to be made a slave of forever. I shall look out for myself some day."

"You do that now pretty well," said Symantha.

No answer was returned, and the family sat down to dinner.

"Did you really keep school once, uncle Phin?" asked Kit.

"Yes," replied her uncle, "when I was a young man I taught one winter in that very red school-house. I was a good scholar once, thanks to my mother."

"Was your mother a nice woman?" asked Kit, who was always hungry for any thing like a story.

"That she was,—as good a woman as ever breathed," replied Phin, his hard face softening a little. "She had a great many notions that I don't believe in, but she was just as good as they make."

"What a pity her grand-daughters are not like her!" said Melissa sarcastically.

"It *is* a pity," replied her father dryly.

"Perhaps Kit may take after her if she keeps on going to school," continued Melissa. "Miss Armstrong is very pious, teaches the children verses out of the Bible, and talks to them like a Methodist class-leader."

"Maybe she will have to stop that some day," said her father. "But, anyhow, the red schoolhouse is the only one near here, and Kit shall go to school if the teacher talks all through the Old Testament, and the New Testament too."

"Am I to go to school this afternoon?" asked Kit as Phin rose from the table.

"It is hardly worth while, I guess: you won't more than get there before school is out. However, you can do as you like," said Phin.

Kit knew she should be in time for at least a part of the afternoon session; so she made herself tidy, and skipped away rejoicing, her precious little Testament safe in her pocket. She entered school somewhat out of breath, and slipped into her seat as quietly as possible.

"You are late, Kitty, and you were away this morning," said Miss Armstrong. "How does that happen?"

"Melissa kept me at home to help do the work," answered Kit. "Symantha had one of her sick headaches, and couldn't sit up a minute. But uncle Phin says I mustn't do it again. He says it is bad for me and bad for the teacher."

"How impudent she is, to answer Miss Armstrong so!" thought Selina. An undefined feeling of anger at Kit had been lurking in her mind ever since the day before, and she was glad to find something to justify it. Miss Armstrong, however, did not seem the least disturbed.

"Your uncle is right," said she: "irregular and tardy scholars hurt both themselves and the school."

Now you may take your book, and study your spelling and reading lessons."

It was with a feeling of satisfaction that Kit produced her nice new reader and spelling-book. The Red Hill district stuck to Webster's spelling-book, which was, perhaps, one reason why most of the children really learned to spell. The day before, Kit had been obliged to borrow her neighbor's books, which did not please her at all, for she had an independent spirit. She was tempted to look at all the pictures, and read all the stories; but she reflected that she could do that as well after school, and applied herself to her lesson with such zeal that she went up several places in the spelling-class. At recess she brought her books to Miss Armstrong.

"Please, Miss Armstrong, will you write my name in my new books?"

"Certainly, my dear. What shall I write?"

Kit's face darkened a little. "That's just the trouble," said she. "I hate 'Keturah,' and I don't believe it is my name either."

"Suppose we write it 'Kitty,'" said Miss Armstrong: "that is short for Catherine, but it will do quite as well for Keturah. But you should not hate the name of Keturah, my dear. She was a great lady, I suppose; at least, she was the wife of a very great man."

"Was she?" asked Kit, much interested.

"Yes: she was the second wife of Abraham, one of the most distinguished men that ever lived. Abraham was called the friend of God, and talked with Him face to face. So you see Keturah is not a bad name, after all."

"I shall like it better, now I know about it; but I don't believe it is my right name, for all that," said Kit. "But please, Miss Armstrong, may I ask you about something else?"

"After school," said Miss Armstrong, smiling. "I suppose, Kit, it never occurs to you children to think that a teacher likes her recess, as well as her scholars."

"I am real sorry I bothered you," said Kit penitently. "I won't say another word." And, putting her books away, she went out to the playground, where a lively game was in progress.

"Here is Kit; she'll be *it*, I know!" exclaimed Sarah Leet. "You will, won't you, Kit?"

"Of course, when I know what you are playing," answered Kit. "What do you want me to do?"

"Oh, to be king. We are playing king's land; and it is Selina's turn, but she won't."

"I will, and I'll catch you too," said Kit, darting after Sarah, and catching her on the verge of her own territory. "There, I'll let you off, because it was not quite fair to catch you before you had time to get off. — Now, girls, look out for yourselves."

"What a nice, good-natured little thing she is, after all!" said Faith Fletcher as Kit darted hither and thither, always on the watch, and turning up where she was least expected.

"Oh, yes, very nice indeed!" said Selina, to whom the remark was addressed. "I wonder how long it will last."

"Well, I don't see how you can wish to spite the poor little thing so," said Sarah. "I should think

you would have some feeling for her, trying so hard to make something of herself."

"I don't spite her, and you have no business to say so," said Selina angrily.

"Well, that's the way it looks to me. When a person never can say a good word for another, and never likes to hear any one else do it, it looks a good deal like spite. However, it is no business of mine. — I'm on the king's land; the king — Ah, you little spirit! I might have known you would catch me. There is the bell, so I don't care."

The verse Miss Armstrong gave the children that evening was rather a long one, — "God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (St. John iii. 16). She asked a few questions, which were answered intelligently, even by the little children, though the Fletcher twins could not tell where Christ was born.

"Sister is so busy, she has hardly any time to teach them," said Faith apologetically, after school; "but I thought they knew that."

"Cannot you teach them, Faith? Have you no time to tell these little ones about the Saviour who died for them?"

"They go to Sunday school always," said Faith, "every Sunday unless it is bad weather."

"Sunday schools are very good things, but they can never take the place of home teaching. Don't you help them learn their lessons?"

"There is always so much to do Sundays and Saturdays," answered Faith. And then she added

frankly, "I guess the truth is, I never thought of it; but I'll try to get time before next Sunday."

"Do," said Miss Armstrong; "and, Faith, when you go to bed, read the parable of the sower, and remember that the cares of this world choke the Word, and make it unfruitful, quite as often and quite as surely as the deceitfulness of riches. Good-night, my child. — Now, Kitty, what can I do for you?"

"Please, Miss Armstrong, is the New Testament part of the Bible?" asked Kit.

"Certainly, my dear, and a very important part. It contains the history of our Lord Jesus Christ. Why?"

"I was looking for a Bible up in the garret, and I found this," answered Kit, producing her treasure. "I read some in it this morning about Mary and Joseph, and the baby that was Christ the Lord. Was He really?"

"Really and truly, Kitty, — as really and truly as that He now sits at the right hand of God the Father, ready to hear and help us in all our troubles."

"That is very strange," said Kit. "But I think it is lovely, too," she added, her eyes lighting up with their peculiar sapphire-like brilliancy. "Isn't it wonderful to think that He knows all about us?"

"The more you know of the matter, the more strange and lovely it will appear to you, my dear. Now, let me advise you to begin here at this second chapter of St. Matthew's Gospel, and read this book through, and at the same time ask God to teach you to understand it."

"And will He?"

"Yes: He has promised He will, and He always keeps His word."

"I'm sure I'm glad of it," said Kit in her matter-of-fact way; "because I don't have any help only what you give me. I can't go to church and Sunday school, like the others."

"If you could, my dear, if you had all the human helps in the world, you would need God's help just as much. The most learned man in the world needs it just as much as you do. Now, see here; I have something else for you. Here is a card with the Lord's Prayer printed on it in nice plain letters; I want you to take it and learn it, so you can say it with the others. It is in your Testament too."

"Is it called the Lord's Prayer because He made it?" asked Kit.

"Yes, for that very reason."

"Here is something else printed on the card, — 'The Apostles' Creed,'" said Kit, spelling out the word with some trouble. "What is that?"

"That is what all Christians believe, — a kind of summing-up of all the truths of the Bible," answered Miss Armstrong. "Learn that too. Suppose you read it over to me."

"I have heard that somewhere, I know," said Kit when she had finished reading the Creed. "Seems to me it was in a church out West, but I can't tell exactly. I guess it was in the Indian church. But, Miss Armstrong, I shall have to learn these in school, I guess."

"Very well; we will make time for them. Now I must not keep poor Selina waiting any longer. Good-night, my dear, and God bless you!"

CHAPTER IV.

STRANGERS.

"ARE you tired of waiting, Selina?" asked Miss Armstrong as she locked the schoolhouse door, and put the key into her basket. "You need not have staid. I don't believe I should be so stupid as to lose my way twice."

"I liked to," said Selina with a great effort: "it is pleasanter than walking home alone. But I think it is too bad to keep you after school so."

"Oh, I am used to that," answered Miss Armstrong, smiling. "I usually get 'kept after school' oftener than my scholars do. I am pleased when the girls come to me with questions. I am very much interested in poor Kitty; I hope to be able to do something for her."

"They must be an ignorant, low set," said Selina. "Fancy any one not knowing that the New Testament is a part of the Bible!"

"A good deal more than half the people in the world are in the same condition, including various kings, nobles, and others of unquestionable gentility," said Miss Armstrong. "I have met with many

such cases in the city; but I was surprised, I confess, to find one here."

"Oh, well! Phin Mallory has not always lived here. He has lived out West, and in all sorts of wild places," replied Selina, jealous for the reputation of the neighborhood. "If he had grown up in Oldham, I dare say he would have been different."

"I think it altogether probable that one might find people who have grown up in Oldham whose cases are still more remarkable," said Miss Armstrong, "though such cases are so common that their peculiarity does not strike you unless you consider the matter."

"I don't know what you mean," said Selina.

"I am thinking of people who have been brought up to know a great deal about both the Old and New Testaments, who are carefully instructed in the Bible, and profess to believe it, and who yet behave as if there were no such thing."

Selina blushed. She knew very well that this was very much her own case. "Do you think that is so much more strange?" said she.

"Which would be the more remarkable,—that a man should walk off a precipice in the dark, or that he should do so in the daytime with his eyes open?" asked Miss Armstrong.

"That he should do it in the daytime, of course," replied Selina; "but that is different."

"It is a fair illustration, I think," said Miss Armstrong. "A man professes to believe that there is no salvation for any one who does not accept the Lord Jesus for his Saviour, and give himself up to Him; and yet he does neither."

“I don’t understand what people mean by that,” said Selina, — “I mean, by what they call a saving faith.”

“A saving faith, as distinguished from a merely historic faith, is a faith that leads to action. To give you a homely illustration: Mr. Bassett, here in the mill, believes that school will open at nine o’clock to-morrow; that is, if he thinks of it at all. But it makes no practical difference to him: he will not rise an hour earlier, or make any change in his arrangements, on that account. But to me it is, so to speak, the central fact of my day; and all my plans are made in reference to it. So a man has a kind of belief in the Saviour; that is, he believes that there was such a person, and that He did the works ascribed to Him: but he does not make any alteration in his life on that account. But let that man be once waked up to the truth that he is a lost sinner, with no hope of deliverance except in this same Saviour, and he will not rest till he has made that Saviour his own.”

“Then all people want is, to be waked up,” said Selina. “If that is the case, I wonder true Christians don’t talk to people about such things more than they do.”

“It is, no doubt, a duty grievously neglected,” said Miss Armstrong; “but it is not all, by any means. People go on in sin, not because they don’t know any better, but because they love sin. They know, that, if they become really Christians, they must do many things which they don’t like to do, and give up many things they don’t like to give up; and they

cannot make up their minds to such a course. The cross looks very hard and heavy, and they don't like to meddle with it."

"Some people say there is nothing but joy in the life of a true Christian," observed Selina.

"The life of a true Christian must be very unlike that of his Master, then," replied Miss Armstrong. "The very sight and thought of so many going the broad way to destruction must hinder any true Christian from being perfectly happy at all times. 'The disciple is not above his Master, nor the servant above his Lord.' But, Selina, how is it with you? You ought not to need any arousing on this subject."

"One may sometimes have too much of a good thing," said Selina lightly; and then, willing to dismiss the subject, she exclaimed, "I wonder whose carriage this is coming up the hill! I am sure it does not belong about here."

"It is Mrs. Van Zandt's," said Miss Armstrong with an expression of pleasure. "She wrote me that she meant to drive over from Oldbury." As she spoke, the carriage came up to them and stopped; and the coachman, touching his hat, asked Selina if they were in the right road to the Van Zandt mansion.

"You are right so far, but you must turn to the left by that red house," said Selina. She looked round for Miss Armstrong, and saw that she was already at the carriage window, exchanging greetings with the persons within. One was an old lady with beautiful white hair put up in puffs under a shady

bonnet. The others seemed to be young, but Selina could not see them distinctly. She felt a sense of being forlorn and neglected, as if Miss Armstrong had somehow done her an injury by being acquainted with these strangers, while she was not. It was not very reasonable, but it is a feeling which almost every one has experienced at some time. Miss Armstrong hastened to catch up with her.

"What made you run away?" said she. "I wanted Mrs. Van Zandt to see you."

"She is a handsome old lady, isn't she?" said Selina, not answering the question, which, indeed, she would not have found easy. "How prettily she was dressed! I do love to see an old lady dressed *like* an old lady."

"And so do I," answered Miss Armstrong. "There is no more pitiable spectacle, to my mind, than that of an old woman trying to look young."

"Some old people *feel* young," observed Selina. "There is Miss Delia Claxton standing at her gate now. She says she does not feel any older than she did when she was twenty, but she does not dress young."

"I dare say not. People who feel young seldom do. How very pretty she is!"

Miss Delia did indeed look wonderfully pretty as she stood under the great tree at her own gate, with the flickering lights and shadows glancing over her delicate calico dress, and the white Shetland shawl she had thrown over her head. She was an alert little body, with a clear, dark complexion, plenty of color, and bright hazel eyes, made still brighter by the whiteness of her abundant wavy hair.

“Good evening, Miss Armstrong,” she said in a cheery voice as soon as that lady came within hailing distance. “I am out staring after our new neighbors, you see. That isn’t very dignified, is it? but, dear me, one sees so little here, that a travelling-carriage is quite a sight. Celia says you know these ladies, Miss Armstrong, and that they are very nice people.”

“That they certainly are,” said Miss Armstrong, smiling. “I think you will like them very much.”

“Well, I am glad to hear that,” said Miss Delia emphatically; “because, you see, being connections in a kind of way, we must call upon them. Dick Van Zandt’s mother was first cousin to our mother. She was a Butler, you see, and her mother was a Ring belonging to the Rings of Rollock, the same family that our maternal grandmother came from; so, of course, we must call. You will smile at that, though,” added Miss Delia, breaking in on herself with a good-natured laugh: “strangers don’t understand how much we think of relationship and descent in these parts.”

“I am Scotch, and an Armstrong,” replied Miss Armstrong, smiling in her turn; “and you know the Scotch count kindred to the tenth degree, at least. But I assure you, Miss Delia, you will like Mrs. Van Zandt very much. She is odd, — at least, most people consider her so, — but she is very lovely.”

“I am considered odd myself, so I can’t quarrel with that,” replied Miss Delia. “You see, we don’t often call on the summer boarders,” she added: “one does not know much about their antecedents, as a rule, and

some of them are not very nice. — I hear that the Richmonds are coming back, Selina."

"They are, I believe," answered Selina rather shortly, as though the subject were not very agreeable.

"Well, if they do, I hope you won't go making an intimate of that Amelia," said Miss Delia: "she is not a nice friend for you. Well, there, child, don't color so: I didn't mean to hurt your feelings. — Miss Armstrong, won't you and Selina come in and stay to tea? I am sure Celia would be delighted to have you. You will excuse my not having called. The fact is, I had been coloring carpet-rags, and I never can do that without coloring my hands at the same time; so I told Celia she must do duty for both. But I should so like to have you stay to tea!"

"Not to-night," replied Miss Armstrong, seizing the chance when Miss Delia stopped for lack of breath. "Some other night I shall be very happy."

"Any time; stop in on your way home from school. — Here, wait a minute." She went into the house as she spoke, and returned with a plate of cakes.

"Here, Selina, take these to your mother," said she; then to Miss Armstrong, in explanation, "They are old-fashioned ginger-nuts made with honey. It is a family recipe, and they do say nobody but a Claxton can make them properly; but I will give you the rule if you like."

"And I will give you the recipe for short-bread, which they say none but a Scotchwoman can make properly; and we will both try to disprove the rule," answered Miss Armstrong. "Come, Selina; we

ought to be at home. Your mother will think I am lost again. — Good-night, Miss Delia. — What a bright little lady she is!” added Miss Armstrong as they walked away. “She seems quite different from her sister.”

“Most people like Miss Celia best,” remarked Selina: “Miss Delia is so sharp, and she makes such queer remarks. One day Mrs. Blandy — she lives in that big house on the corner next the church — she said one day at the society that she didn’t believe in foreign missions. ‘Well,’ said Miss Delia, ‘if every one had been of your mind, Mrs. Blandy, you would be going about dressed in a neat-fitting suit of blue paint instead of that handsome black silk, and hiding away that fat little boy of yours to keep him from being burned alive as a sacrifice to Bel.’ — ‘What do you mean, Miss Delia?’ asked Mrs. Blandy. ‘Nothing, only that was what your ancestors were doing in the time when the Church at Jerusalem sent out so many foreign missionaries,’ answered Miss Delia; ‘and, if the apostles had been of your way of thinking, you would probably be doing the same now.’”

“I don’t see any thing odd in that,” remarked Miss Armstrong: “it was only a simple statement of facts. And what then?”

“And then Mrs. Blandy said it was a very different thing, sending missionaries to England, from what it was sending them clear off to India; and Miss Delia said, ‘Yes, very different: a much harder and more perilous journey, and much more trouble and danger when they got there.’ You see, Miss Delia is a

great reader, and she never forgets any thing: so, when people talk against missions or any such thing, she always gets the last word."

"I should say she deserved it if she always argued as well as in this case," said Miss Armstrong, much amused.

"Yes, ma'am; but you see people don't like to be put down, and shown to be in the wrong. I'm sure I don't."

"What! not when you are in the wrong?"

"I think that is the time when one likes it least of all," replied Selina frankly.

"But how are you ever to be set right, in that case?"

"I don't think Mrs. Blandy cared about being set right, very much," replied Selina. "She said again that charity began at home. And then Miss Delia began to talk about the orphan-asylum at Oldbury, and poor Mrs. Graves who has a sick husband and four little children. And she asked Mrs. Blandy if she had not a frock to make over for the little girls, so they could be decent to come to Sunday school; but Mrs. Blandy said she was calculating to make a rag carpet pretty soon, and she had to save all her old clothes for that, because she meant to take the prize for it at the State fair."

Miss Armstrong smiled and sighed. She had met a great many Mrs. Blandys in her lifetime.

"I think I should like to be a foreign missionary," said Selina, after they had walked a little way in silence.

"Why?" asked Miss Armstrong.

"Oh, because there would be some adventure and romance about it. It would not be all prose, like one's life here."

"My dear, if you allow your life to be all prose here, it would be prosy anywhere. And the prose of a mission-life among heathen is much more disagreeable than that of a daughter's life at home in New England. I know, because I have tried it. What would you think, for instance, of combing and washing a dozen children who never were combed or washed before in their lives?"

"I did not suppose missionary ladies did such things as that," said Selina.

"They do a great many such things as that, and worse, such as I don't care to tell you about just before supper," replied Miss Armstrong. "I have often wished that our missionaries would give us more of just such details, that people could see what the life really is."

"Why don't they?" asked Selina.

"Well, for various reasons. They are afraid, for one thing, of disgusting and discouraging people; making them think there is no use in doing any thing."

"I should think, the worse the people were, the more need there was for teaching them better," observed Selina.

"That is a very just remark, but a great many people do not see it in that light. Then these matters of personal experience become every-day occurrences, and they do not think of them as being any more novel or interesting to others than to themselves."

"I think they are interesting, though," said Selina. "Little things like that are just what make a story seem real."

"Very true, again. But, Selina, you would never make a missionary if that is to be your only motive. The romance and adventure soon wear off, and the hard and prosaic duties remain. You need a much stronger and purer motive than that, even the love of God in your heart, the same that sent the early Christians everywhere preaching the Word, and that now sends hundreds of men and women every year to preach the glad tidings to those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death. Have you that love in your heart?"

"I am afraid not," answered Selina. "But, suppose I had, do you think I should make a good missionary?"

"I could hardly say that on so short an acquaintance," replied Miss Armstrong. "Consider, my dear, that I have not known you quite a week. I do not see, however, any reason why you should not make as good a missionary as another. But, Selina, let me say one word more: unless you *have* that love in your heart, you are no more fit for a life here at home than you would be for a life in India. You want Him just as much in one place as another, and you can no more be happy without Him. Won't you think about that, my child?"

"Yes, Miss Armstrong, I will," answered Selina; and at the time she fully meant what she said. She was much more pleasant all the rest of the week, and her mother rejoiced over the change. "Girls

are full of moods and fancies," she said to her husband. "We must have patience, father."

"I never knew you to have any thing else, mother," was the reply. Mr. Weston had full confidence in his wife's judgment, and he was very fond of his adopted daughter.

It had long been the custom to hold a service in the red schoolhouse on Friday evenings. This service was usually called the Bible class, because a portion of Scripture, usually the Epistle or Gospel for the next Sunday, was given out beforehand to be talked over. The minister, if he was present, read a short service; and a hymn was sung to a familiar tune. Then the discussion was opened by the pastor, or whoever supplied his place; and every one spoke who had any thing to say. Even the little children were encouraged to repeat texts, and verses of hymns. This service had been started by old Dr. Munson, who had preached, and also practised, in Oldham for forty years. He had been dead for a quarter of a century, but the Bible class he had begun lived after him.

The meetings of the class were usually tolerably well attended in winter; but the numbers fell off in warm weather, when, truth to tell, the red schoolhouse was apt to be warm and close. Those who came on this particular evening, however, were destined to find it much more comfortable than usual.

"Now, who will stay and help me put the school-room in order?" asked Miss Armstrong, as the afternoon session drew to a close.

The girls looked at each other in surprise.

"The Bible class meets here this evening, Miss Armstrong," said Ruth Jewsbury.

"I know it, my dear. That is just the reason we want to put the room in nice order."

"I don't see it," answered Ruth bluntly.

"Don't see what?"

"I don't see the use of sweeping, when the people will put all out of order again."

"Suppose some distinguished person — Mr. Longfellow, say, or the Bishop — were going to be here."

"Oh, well! then, of course, we should want things to look neat. But there will be nobody like that coming to-night."

"Are you sure?" asked Miss Armstrong. "Who is it that says, 'Where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them'?"

"I never thought of that," said Sarah Leet. "But, Miss Armstrong, why don't they keep the church cleaner, then?"

"You must put that question to somebody besides me," answered Miss Armstrong. "Now, who will help me?"

Half a dozen volunteered at once, of whom Kit Mallory was one. There was a large old-fashioned fireplace in the room, which had been closed with a fireboard when the increasing scarcity of wood had made a stove necessary. Miss Armstrong had persuaded Mr. Weston to remove this board, and leave open the great chimney, which thus made an excellent ventilating-shaft. She had found a tall pickle-jar among Mrs. Weston's stores, which she placed on the hearth, and filled, with the children's assist-

ance, with sweet-fern, cedar-boughs, and brakes. The windows were opened at top and bottom, the room carefully swept and dusted, and a glass of fresh, sweet flowers placed on the table.

"How nice it looks, and how fresh and sweet it smells!" said Kit, who had been one of Miss Armstrong's most efficient helpers. "Isn't it too bad, Miss Armstrong, that I can't come to the meeting?"

"Can't come to the meeting? why not?" asked the voice of Mr. Bassett, the miller, from the open door. "Why can't you come, child?"

"Uncle Phin won't let me," answered Kit. She did not care to be further catechised about her uncle and his ways, and slipped away without even bidding Miss Armstrong good-night, — an omission which Selina did not fail to notice, and register in her private account of Kit's misdeeds.

"Poor little young one!" said the kindly miller. "What a shame that she can't come, when she wants to so much! I feel for that child. I wish one could do something for her."

"I hope something may be done; but it seems one of the cases where one must proceed with caution, for fear of doing more harm than good."

"I guess you are about right there. We must keep her in mind, and perhaps a way will be opened. Well, Miss Armstrong, I came over to fix things for the Bible class, but I don't see that you have left me any thing to do. That is a first-rate idea, — getting that chimney open. I don't blame people for getting sleepy when the room is hot as an oven, and so close

you couldn't slip in a flax-seed sharp end first. I feel as if we were going to have a real good time."

"What about lights?" asked Miss Armstrong.

"I always calculate to provide them. We don't have many in summer. — I hope you will all come, girls, and all have a verse at least. Will your sister be out, Faith?"

"I don't believe she will," answered Faith: "she has so much to do."

"She would do it a deal easier, and better too, if she would take some rest now and again, — that's my opinion," said the miller. "Between the mill and the farm and the blacksmith-shop, I have plenty of irons in the fire, and I don't let them get cold, either; but I couldn't afford not to take time for the Bible class. You tell her what I say. And you come along with me: I've got some nice early pease to send her. The folks laughed at me for buying them, — they're some I sent for to Flower City, — and said the old-fashioned ones were good enough. 'You have the laugh,' says I, 'I'll have the pease.' Now I've got the laugh, and the pease too. Come along, little ones, and see if Ma Bassett hasn't got some gingerbread. You leave the key, Miss Armstrong, and I'll see to the rest. I feel as if we were going to have a real good time."

CHAPTER V.

THE MEETING.

It appeared that Mr. Bassett's prophecy was going to be fulfilled; so far, at least, as numbers were concerned. The children carried home the news that Miss Armstrong had the schoolhouse all swept out, instead of leaving it to be done at noon on Saturday; that she had helped to dust the desks and seats with her own hands, and had put flowers on the desk and in the fireplace, because she said the room ought to be made neat and pleasant for the service of God. Truth to tell, this idea, which would not be considered very original in many places, was one which had not found entrance to the minds of people in Oldham.

"She had better go and talk to Mr. Archimball, the sexton at the Corners," said Mrs. Gleason, when Agnes told her what Miss Armstrong had said. "I do hate to wear my black silk to church Sundays, because I get it just covered with dust. I believe I will go to Bible class this evening."

"Do," said Agnes. "I'll take care of the milk if you will."

"Oh, we can both go. It is only to have supper a little earlier. Set the table, and I'll have it ready directly."

"Won't you go to the class to-night, sister?" asked Faith Fletcher when she had put away the children's books, and put on their home aprons.

"How can I go?" asked Patience. "There is the milk to take care of, and the dishes to wash, and Eddy's new frock to finish so she can wear it on Sunday. It is easy to talk about going to class."

"Well, I can wash the dishes and take care of the milk as well as you, if you would only think so; and there will be time enough to finish Eddy's frock to-morrow. Besides, if she don't have it, she can wear her old one: it looks as well as it did last Sunday. Come, sister, do go for once. Mr. Bassett says he knows it will do you good."

"Yes, much he knows about my work."

"Well, there is one thing *I* would like to know," said Faith, who was not easily put down when she once took a fit of "arguing," as her sister called it: "I should like to know where is the use of being a Christian when one does not get any comfort or help out of it. Seems to me, if I was a church-member, and professed to love the Lord better than any one else, I'd go where I was sure to meet Him, even if I had to put my dishes in cold water to soak, and didn't wash them till next morning."

"What a girl you are to talk!" said Patience, half vexed, half laughing. "It is a pity you were not a boy, so you could be a preacher. I suppose I ought to go sometimes, that's a fact."

"Mr. Bassett says it would do you good," persisted Faith. "He says, with all he has to do, he finds it a rest to go to the class. Come, sister, do try it for once. I'll put the children to bed, and do all the work, if you will."

"Don't you want to go yourself?"

"Yes, I should like it well enough; but I don't suppose we could both be spared. Pa couldn't put the twins to bed."

"What is that pa can't do?" asked Mr. Fletcher from the door. He was a tall, spare, elderly man, with a somewhat careworn, considerate face, grave but not unkindly, and with a sparkle of humor in it. "What is that you think pa can't do? Put the children to bed? He can do it as well as you or any old woman in Oldham; and, if he should happen to stick the pins in with the heads west instead of east, sissy can alter 'em when she comes home. They won't disturb the balance of the solar system much for that time. Just run down and let in the cows, Faithy: they are mooing at the bars; and look on my work-bench, and see if I left my other glasses. — The fact is, sister, Faith is more than half right," he added more seriously. "I don't like to say any thing that sounds like blaming you, considering all you do; but just look at it. You say you wish Faith cared more about religion; but how can you wonder that she thinks it a matter of no great consequence, after all, when she sees us let every thing come before it, — when she sees us, who, as she says, profess to love God, so wrapped up in the little things of this world that we haven't any time for His service? I

must say, when I heard the child talking just now, I felt reproved."

"Oh, well, I'll go," said Patience in a somewhat aggrieved tone; "but I think it is rather hard on me, when I make a slave of myself for you and the children, to be called worldly and all that, as if I spent my whole time dressing and visiting, like Mary Blandy."

"In the first place, I didn't call you so, not as I remember," replied her father. "I said *we* were too much taken up with the things of the world; which I take to be all things that perish in the using, whether they be dresses, or rolls of butter, or bean-threshers. In the next place, daughter, we should none of us be slaves, but the Lord's free men and free women."

"Why don't you go yourself, then, pa, if we are going to do so much good by it?" asked Patience, already ashamed of her little burst of temper, which, in truth, was more nervous fatigue than any thing else.

"Because I think you need rest and refreshment rather more than I do, my daughter. A man's work is less tiring than a woman's, seeing he is out in the fresh air most of the time; at least, that is my opinion."

"Everybody isn't like you, pa," said poor Patience, who felt the moisture uncomfortably near her eyes. "Ezra makes more steps in a day when he is at home than you do in a week, though he is always saying, 'Oh, don't trouble yourself!'"

"Ezra is only a boy; but he is a pretty good boy,

after all, and we are both prouder of him than a hen with one chicken," returned her father. "Come, sister, go to the class, and take Faith; and let me put the little ones to bed. Maybe the child might get just the word she needs."

"Well, I don't care if I do," said Patience; and she went.

The room at the red schoolhouse was really full, —an uncommon sight at any time, and especially in summer. All the Westons and Bassetts were there, of course, as well as Miss Celia and Miss Delia: these were the standbys always on hand. What a blessing it is that there are always a few such standbys belonging to every parish! Patience Fletcher came in with Faith, and sat down by the window. Then there were the Jewsbury girls, who did not often go to church, even on Sunday; and old Miss Wright, who eked out a scanty living by bleaching and trimming bonnets, and who had never been to church at Oldham since the last rector's sister bought her bonnet ready trimmed at Oldbury; and almost all the children of the school who were big enough to sit up till eight o'clock. Just as it was time for the service to begin, there was a little movement at the door; and Mrs. Barbara Van Zandt came in, followed by her two young nieces, Miss Bogardus and Ida Van Zandt. Mrs. Van Zandt wore a large, soft white wrap, and had put a light, fleecy summer hood over the widow's cap she always wore. She was a very handsome old lady, with those bright-gray eyes which have a way of looking black from the dilation of the pupils, and which no age or sickness ever

quenches. She was one of those people of whom one naturally says, on seeing them, "Who is that?" She accepted the chair set for her, with a kindly smile, and bent her head for a few moments in prayer. Ida and Amity slipped into seats beside Patience and Faith Fletcher.

"What a plain little body!" thought Patience. "Nobody would take her for a great heiress. But she looks good, as if one could depend on her."

"What a fine face, if it were not so tired and worn!" thought Amity. "She must be carrying a great weight, somehow. I wish one could do something to help her." And Amity did something for Patience then and there, though Patience never knew it.

The meeting was opened in the usual way. There was no rector in Oldham at present, so Mr. Weston read a part of the evening service, and gave out the hymn, "Jesus, lover of my soul." There was a little delay: the young man who usually started the hymn was not present. But in a moment a new voice began the beautiful Spanish Hymn, — such a voice, for power and cultivation, as had never been heard in the red schoolhouse before. People almost held their breath to listen, and it seemed at first as if Ida would have all the singing to herself; but presently one and another joined in, till every one in the room was singing, children and all.

"Wasn't that lovely!" whispered Faith, getting hold of her sister's hand, and squeezing it. Patience smiled, and returned the pressure; but she did not speak.

When the hymn was done, Mr. Weston read a part of the tenth chapter of St. John, and called upon Mr. Bassett to begin the lesson. Mr. Bassett had what he would have called a good common-school education. He knew Brown's Grammar from beginning to end, and could have parsed any sentence you liked to give him: but, like other people, when he was in earnest, he went back to his native idioms; and he was much in earnest to-night. He spoke of the Shepherd's love, not only for His obedient sheep, but for the others who were not of His fold, — for those who, ignorant and misled, had gone astray, and were lost on the dark mountains. He spoke of the duty of true disciples toward such lost lambs; and of how much might be done by kindness, and watchfulness of opportunities, to lead them back to the Shepherd's arms. There was just such a lost lamb — nay, the very one the good man had in his mind — listening under the window at that moment. Mr. Bassett did not know that, but the Shepherd did.

The children repeated their verses more or less correctly; and two or three, who had not learned any, determined to do so next time. Miss Armstrong repeated two verses of the old Scotch version of the twenty-third Psalm, "The Lord's my Shepherd; I'll not want." Miss Celia Claxton said a few words on her verse, "I will guide thee with mine eye" (Ps. xxxii. 8). She spoke of the service of God setting free from the corroding cares of this world, and how those who kept close enough to the Shepherd to see His face were spared many distressing doubts and perplexities, because His loving and warning glance

made all things plain. Patience Fletcher repeated a verse from the one hundred and nineteenth Psalm, "My soul cleaveth unto the dust: quicken Thou me according to Thy word."

There was a little pause, and then Mrs. Van Zandt's voice was heard, a little tremulous with age, —

"Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Mrs. Van Zandt said a few words on the need and sweetness of rest, and the impossibility of finding it anywhere but in Christ, and then only by making a full surrender and consecration of the heart and all the powers to Him, — by ceasing from our own works, and doing all to Him. It was very simple and obvious, but it went home to more than one heart. There were two more short addresses, and another hymn was sung, —

"Sun of my soul, thou Saviour dear."

Ida was a little shy of beginning this time, till Mr. Weston said, "Perhaps the young lady will start the tune again," when she raised her glorious voice once more; and every one joined with a hearty good-will refreshing to hear. There was a collect, and then the class was dismissed. People lingered for the usual neighborly greeting; and before the first one issued from the door, a little dark figure, which had been crouched under the window, rose, and sped away over the hill.

Miss Celia and Miss Delia had already called upon the new-comers. "They are really our cousins, you know, by way of the Rings and Butlers," they had

said, in a kind of half apology, when questioned on the subject. The two sisters now shook hands with Mrs. Van Zandt and the young ladies, and Miss Delia remarked that she was glad to see them out.

"I never willingly miss such a service," said Mrs. Van Zandt. "I always feel, apart from the enjoyment, that one owes a duty to such an effort made in one's own neighborhood."

"I wish every one felt so," said Mr. Bassett. "I want to thank this young lady for helping us out in the singing."

"I am sure you are very welcome," replied Ida simply. "I am choir leader in our little mission chapel at the Works, so it comes quite natural to me. I really did it upon impulse the first time; but, when I came to think, it seemed like 'taking on,' as the children say, for a stranger."

"I don't think one ever ought to feel like a stranger in the house of God," remarked Miss Celia. "We are all of one family there, you know, my dear."

"That is very true," said Ida.

"Well, Miss Armstrong, I told you we were going to have a good time," said the miller, as he locked the door, and gave Miss Armstrong the key; then, as he walked homeward between his wife and Aunt Betsy, he added, "I feel to be thankful that our new neighbors turn out to be such good Christian folks, ready to take their share in our meeting."

"Well, I must say I think they took their full share to-night, and a little more," said Aunt Betsy, who had regarded the new-comers with suspicion and disfavor. "I don't think I care about having

strangers from the city coming here and setting up to teach us, — folks whose fathers and grandfathers sat under old Dr. Munson. To see that old lady coming to meeting with that thing on her head like a heap of beaten-up white of egg! I'll be bound she would never think of wearing such a thing on Broadway. And that girl with her singing: of course it was very fine, but it was far too operatic and theatrical for my taste."

"How many operas and theatrical performances did you ever see, Aunt Betsy?" asked Mrs. Bassett, who had a tongue of her own, and did not stand as much in awe of the old lady as most of her neighbors.

"Come, come!" said Mr. Bassett. "Seems to me some of them fowls of the air that picked up the good seed in the parable have lit down among us. This isn't the spirit we should be in after such favor as has been shown us to-night. I was so glad to see Patience Fletcher out. Poor thing! she looks very tired."

"Well, she makes a great deal harder work of life than she needs to," said Mrs. Bassett. "She just makes herself a slave to the house and the children; and, after all, she doesn't do any more for them than I do for mine."

"Not as much," said her husband.

"Well, I don't think she makes things as pleasant, if I say it that shouldn't. I had the twins down to spend the afternoon not long ago; and the poor things were afraid to make a natural motion, for fear of spoiling their clothes, till Myra dressed them up

in some old things of Ben's and Sally's. For my part, I like to take the comfort of my children, and have them take comfort as we go along, instead of toiling and slaving to do some grand thing for them by and by, when maybe they won't want it. I guess I'll send up for them again to-morrow: it will take them off Faith's hands, and give her time to learn her Sunday-school lesson in peace."

"And how about yours?" asked Aunt Betsy. "I should think you had enough on your hands now, with all them great tearing boys of yours."

"Oh, two or three children more or less don't matter at our house," answered Mrs. Bassett. "And, as to the Sunday-school lessons, Myra and I learn ours, and teach the children theirs, on Sunday afternoon; then we go over them again Saturday evening after tea, and so they are all ready for Sunday. Good-night, Aunt Betsy. Come down to-morrow, and I'll give you a green-currant pie."

CHAPTER VI.

THE ENEMY.

KIT hoped she might reach home and go to bed without being missed. She had often played out on the hillside till after dark, and no questions had been asked as to where she had been. But fate was against her — or rather the Devil, acting by one of his most harmful agents, a malicious woman, determined neither to be good herself, nor let any one else be so if she could help it. Melissa Mallory was not indifferent to religion, by any means : on the contrary, she hated the very name of it. She had not succeeded in making herself an absolute unbeliever, though she had tried very hard. There always would stay by her, hid in some inner recess of her soul, a terrible lurking dread, — the conviction, that, after all, there *was* a superior power, a great Being who knew of all her sins, and would some day exact a full account of them ; and she felt toward this power as the Eastern king in the story might be supposed to feel toward the lion which he knew was shut up somewhere in his palace, and which might break out any day and devour him. There were people all about, wherever

she went, who professed to be friends with this great enemy of hers, to hold intercourse with and receive benefits from Him; and all such persons she held as her own foes. Melissa had never loved Kit; she considered her an interloper, taking a share of the common funds which she might have enjoyed if Kit had not come into the family. Moreover, she was jealous of Kit's undeniable beauty and wit; and, strange to say, of the child's growing influence over poor Mrs. Mallory. Melissa had never loved her step-mother, and she was habitually unkind to her, professing to believe that half her insanity was affectation, and declaring that it might be driven out of her if Symantha did not indulge and coddle her so. Mrs. Mallory was afraid of Melissa, and always worse when left to her care; but she liked Kit though she did not always know her, and, unless when at the worst, was usually docile, or at least passive, in her hands. Melissa felt this to be a new injury. She liked, as Symantha said, to get a handle against the child; and now she flattered herself that she had found one. She had suspected Kit's purpose, had watched her go, and seen her return, and was all ready to catch her when she came in.

"Well, Kit, did you have a good meeting?"

Phin Mallory had been to Oldbury, and had come home in a very bad humor, — a circumstance on which Melissa had fully calculated. He was reading his newspaper by the light of a very dismal kerosene lamp, which burned viciously sideways when he turned it up, and smoked sulkily when he turned it down, — a circumstance which did not improve his temper in the least.

"Meeting!" said Phin, dropping his paper. "What do you mean?"

"I haven't been to meeting," said Kit.

"You didn't go into the house, but you stood and listened under the window," said Melissa. "You needn't deny it, for I saw you with my own eyes."

"Well, suppose I did: where was the harm?" said Kit boldly, though she trembled as she saw her uncle's eyes fixed on her. "I like to hear the singing. There was one of the young ladies at the stone house, and she sang beautifully."

"Come here," said Phin sternly. Kit dared not disobey. Her uncle took her by the shoulder, and shook her till she was giddy, ending with a sharp box on the ear.

"Take that for a sample of what you will get if you ever go to that place again," said he, pushing her away. "I won't have you go near these people. Do you hear?"

Kit looked at him with a white face and blazing eyes, but did not answer.

"Just look in her pocket, and see what you will find there, pa," said Melissa with a sneering laugh. "You didn't know what a saint you had in the family. See here!"

She caught hold of Kit's dress as she spoke, and, despite her struggles, pulled out her precious Testament, which she handed to her father. Phin took it, and threw it into the fire. With a cry of anguish Kit sprang to rescue her treasure, but only succeeded in setting fire to the sleeve of her dress, and burning her own hand severely.

"Serves you right," said Phin. "You let me see you have such a book again, and I'll put you where you won't see book or school either. I've had enough of pious folks, without your taking up the dodge,—a set of hypocrites who set themselves up above everybody else, and look down on their betters. I won't have it. Do you hear? Stop that noise, and answer me."

Quite beside herself with pain and anger, Kit turned on her uncle, and would have returned his blow if Symantha had not caught her hand. At that moment there came a cry from the inner room,—a wail of such despairing anguish as might have come from a lost spirit,— "They have taken away my Lord. They have taken Him away, and I know not where they have laid Him."

"There, now you have done it," said Symantha angrily. "Now we shall have no rest all night, and perhaps have the neighbors coming in to see what is the matter.—Don't cry, Kit. Come here, and let me do up your hand.—Just see there, father!" she added indignantly, holding up Kit's arm for his inspection. The hand and wrist were fearfully scorched, and already covered with blisters.

"Why didn't she mind, then?" said Phin sullenly. "I'm sure I didn't mean to burn her." To do him justice, he was already ashamed of his outburst. He was not usually so ill-natured, but he had had a hard time in Oldbury that day. He had, so to say, fought for his soul, and lost.

"There, don't cry any more," said Symantha after she had covered the burnt arm thickly with flour, and

done it up in cotton. "I'll help you to bed. And maybe you will get another Testament some time : who knows ? Don't cry if you can help it, that's a good girl : you will make ma worse, and then I shall not know what to do."

"I'll do any thing for you, because you are so good, and I love you," said Kit, trying hard to restrain her sobs ; "but I hate Melissa, and I hate uncle Phin. So !"

"Hush, hush ! There, try to go to sleep. Pa will be sorry to-morrow. He was dreadfully put out when he came home. I'm afraid" —

"Afraid of what ?" asked Kit, as Symantha checked herself.

"I'm afraid ma is going to have a dreadful night," answered Symantha hastily. "There, don't cry any more, but try and lie still, and lay your hand on this pillow ; and I hope you will go to sleep. Poor child ! it was a bad day for you when you came to us."

Kit's hand was badly burned, and smarted terribly ; but her tears, which had full way when Symantha left her, were caused more by anguish of heart than by bodily pain. She was furious against her uncle and Melissa, especially the latter, whom she justly considered the cause of all the trouble ; and Kit was one of those natures to whom rage was grief. But that was not the worst. The little wild girl who had so lately set out in the Christian pilgrimage had already met with Apollyon in his worst form.

"And I was trying so hard to be good !" she sobbed, talking to herself as lonely, neglected children so often do. "I was trying so hard to do what

I thought He would like! and Miss Armstrong said He would help me, and that old lady said the same in the meeting; and He didn't help me, oh, He didn't help me a bit. He let Melissa tell of me, and uncle Phin shake me, and burn my Testament. Oh, dear, oh, dear! what if uncle Phin should be right, and there shouldn't be any such person, after all?"

Kit sobbed anew, and even cried aloud, in the anguish of this doubt. The story which had brought such light and comfort, such wonderful and glorious possibilities, into her dark and sordid life, which had added such new beauties to what she loved best, — if that story were not true, after all!

"Oh, I don't want to live, I don't want to live," cried Kit aloud. "If there isn't any Lord Jesus, I don't want to live at all."¹

"Stop that noise, Kit, or I'll whip you," said Melissa, opening the door. "You little fool, to make such a fuss about an old book full of silly stories!"

Somehow this appearance and assault of her enemy seemed to give Kit a little comfort. Satan is always easier to fight when he comes in a bodily shape.

"It isn't a book full of stories: it is the truth, and you know it, Melissa Mallory. You *know* it is true. There *is* a God, and He is my Father; and, if you abuse me, He will punish you. He can see all you do. Don't you dare to touch me!"

And she did not. That something she had never dared to search out, and had never been able to silence, stirred in her heart. What if it should be true, as Kit said? She contented herself with a

¹ A fact.

threatening gesture, and withdrew, shutting the door. Kit's sturdy profession of faith had at least comforted herself. Yes, she would believe in Him. If He was good, as Miss Armstrong said, perhaps He would make some good come out of this trouble, after all. Then Kit remembered that she had not said her prayers. She rose softly from her bed; and, kneeling down in the bright moonlight, she said her little hymn, and as much of the Lord's Prayer as she remembered, for she had not yet learned it quite perfectly. There was something in it, she knew, about forgiving trespasses. "That means sins, Miss Armstrong said; if we don't forgive people, He won't forgive us. But, oh, dear! how can I forgive uncle Phin for burning my book? And Melissa—it was all her fault." Kit thought a little, and then knelt down again. Her prayer was very simple: "I can't forgive them myself; but if it is true, what teacher says, you can make me. Please do, and help me; for I haven't got any friends only Miss Armstrong." Kit's faith was but weak and faltering, like that of the poor father, "If thou canst do any thing, have compassion on us, and help us;" but the same compassionate ear is ready to hear, and the same hand to save, now as then.

Kit lay awake a long time; but at last the pain in her hand grew less, and she fell asleep. She slept longer than usual, and when she waked the sun was shining into her room.

"It must be ever so late," thought Kit. She started up, and her first move reminded her of all that had happened the night before.

"How shall I ever get dressed?" she thought. She made out to put her clothes on; but to fasten them was beyond her power, so she went down to find Symantha.

Symantha was moving softly about the kitchen, busy in setting things to rights. She held up her finger as Kit opened the door.

"Is aunt asleep?" asked Kit in a whisper. "Did she have a bad night? I thought I heard her."

"Yes, she did not go to sleep till sunrise. Pa has gone out to the barn to get a nap on the hay, and Melissa is not up yet."

"Oh, yes, they can all sleep but you; that is always the way," said Kit indignantly.

"I'm used to it," answered Symantha, smiling rather grimly. "Here's your coffee hot on the stove, and I'll fry you an egg. How does your hand feel?"

"It doesn't smart so much, but it is *awful* sore," said Kit, wincing as she tried to move it. "I can't bear to put it down, it hurts so."

Symantha found a large handkerchief, with which she made a sling for the wounded arm, which she did up again in fresh, clean cotton-wool, — the very best dressing for a burn.

"That is more comfortable," said she. "You must be careful not to hurt it or get cold in it, or you will have a bad hand."

"Can't I go to school?" asked Kit in dismay.

"Oh, yes, if you will be careful, and not hurt yourself playing. You will be as well off there as here. Eat your breakfast or dinner, whichever it is, and you will be in good time for afternoon."

"Is it as late as that?" asked Kit. Symantha pointed to the clock, which stood at half-past eleven.

"I never thought it was so late," said Kit. "Why didn't you call me?"

"Because you needed the sleep, child. There, eat your breakfast while it is hot."

Symantha took her sewing, and sat down by Kit in the window.

"How good you are to me!" said Kit gratefully. "You do love me, don't you, Symantha?"

"Yes, child, I do," answered Symantha with sudden earnestness. "You are about the only comfort I have; but I love you so much that I should like to send you a thousand miles away, where I should never see you again, if I could only get you a good home by it."

"But I don't want to go a thousand miles away," said Kit. "I want to stay with you, and help you, for I love you."

"Then, Kit, if you love me, promise me one thing," said Symantha. "Promise me that you won't let any one — pa, or Melissa, or anybody — drive you, or coax or bribe you, to do any thing wrong. If you have any doubt about the matter, come and ask me."

"I won't," answered Kit earnestly. "There isn't much danger with Melissa, because I don't like her a bit; but uncle Phin is real good to me sometimes. I don't see what ailed him last night."

"He was put out about something when he came home, and he was vexed about your going to meeting. And, Kit, that is a thing you must not do again; at least, not now. Nothing makes father so angry."

"I won't, then," said Kit; "but I should like to." She was silent a while, and then asked, in a half whisper, "Symantha, was it religion that made aunt Martha crazy?"

Symantha nodded.

"I thought it might be, because she always says *that*," said Kit. "How was it?"

"She was brought up to be very religious, and to go to church, and all that," replied Symantha in the same low tone. "She was a regular church-member when she married pa, and, oh, such a pretty, bright creature! Kit, whatever happens, you must always be good to ma. There is more reason for it than you know."

"I will," said Kit. "I think she likes me too. But, if aunt Martha was such a religious woman, how came she to marry uncle Phin? Wasn't he the same that he is now?"

"Yes, very much the same, so far as that goes; only he was not so rough in his ways. He was very handsome in those days, and could make himself very agreeable; and ma thought she was going to influence and convert him, but it worked the other way."

"Seems to me I should rather convert a man first, and marry him afterward," said Kit. "And what then?"

"Well, there isn't much to tell. She used to try to argue with pa, but she was no match for him that way. She used to get vexed, and then he would laugh at her. By and by she got to not going to church; and then pa coaxed her to go out riding with him

Sundays, and do other things that she thought were wrong. After a while she began to be melancholy and queer, and at last one day she tried to kill herself. Ever since then she has been as she is now."

"Seems to me it wasn't her religion that made her crazy, so much as losing it," said Kit shrewdly.

"Sometimes I have thought that, myself. It was a bad day for her when she got acquainted with our family."

"What was aunt Martha's name before she was married?" asked Kit.

"I don't remember," answered Symantha, getting up and going into the pantry. "Don't you want to run out and see if you can find some fresh eggs? If you can, I'll make ma a custard."

"Why, my dear child, what is the matter?" said Miss Armstrong as Kit made her appearance at school with her arm in a sling. "What has happened to your hand?"

"I burnt it," answered Kit, coloring painfully; for she saw the girls looking at her, and felt, as one is apt to do at such times, as if they must know all about it.

"You look hardly fit to come to school," remarked Miss Armstrong kindly. She did not ask how the accident happened; guessing, with the happy instinct that belongs to some people, that there was some unpleasant story connected with it. "Do you feel able to learn your lesson?"

"Yes, ma'am, I would rather study than not," answered Kit. "My arm does not hurt me so very much now when I keep it still."

Kit was quite sincere in what she said. She felt, rather than thought, that the labor of fixing the column of words beginning with "Abase, Abate," would be a relief from the tormenting thoughts which had driven her almost wild. She set herself to work in good earnest to master her lesson. But her mind would wander, in spite of herself; and, when she came to recite, she missed two or three times, and went down to the very bottom of the class. Kit was tired and nervous for want of sleep, and very unhappy besides; the consequence of which was, that, as Faith Fletcher went above her, she lost her temper, gave Faith a push, and called her by a very naughty name. The children looked at each other in horror. Miss Armstrong only said, —

"Kitty may go and sit down. I will talk to her by and by. The children may have a recess."

"Well," said Selina as soon as they were out of doors, "I hope Miss Armstrong has got enough of her favorite. It is lucky for Kit she had not Miss Martin to deal with. Wouldn't she have caught it!"

"Maybe she will catch it as it is," remarked Agnes Gleason.

"I don't believe Miss Armstrong will do any more than talk to her. I am sure I hope not," said gentle Faith. "Poor Kit is half sick: any one can see that by looking at her. And it isn't as if one of us had said it. I don't believe she has ever been taught any better."

"Well, for my part, I hope Miss Armstrong will send her home," said Selina: "she has no business here, using such language, and teaching the children

it. But, girls, didn't we have a good meeting last night? I think that old Mrs. Van Zandt is just lovely. Miss Armstrong says she is a great missionary woman; perhaps she will start a society here."

"Then she will do what nobody else has done," remarked Agnes Gleason. "I remember how hard Miss Martin tried. But what does this Mrs. Van Zandt do, Selina? Did Miss Armstrong tell you?"

"Oh, she is always sending boxes to poor missionaries in the West; and she keeps two ladies in India, and pays all their expenses, — Bible-women, Miss Armstrong called them. I wish she would send me. I should love to go, dearly."

"Yes, you would be a fine hand!" said Sarah Leet. "I suppose, the first time a little Chinese or African child said a bad word, you would send it home, and not let it come to school any more."

"That would be very different," said Selina, coloring, as the girls laughed.

"Yes, very different; having a whole village full of children who never learned even the commonest decency, and having one poor little thing who is trying her best to be good," returned Sarah. "Suppose she did forget herself for once: we all do it sometimes; if not in one way, then in another. Don't *you* ever forget yourself, and say things you ought not to?"

"Yes — you — did — you — know — you — did!" chimed in from the ring of little ones, who were "counting out" for a game of tag. All the girls laughed, the words came so pat.

"Yes, we did, we know we did," repeated Agnes.

"But, Sarah, you need not be so hard on Selina, either," she added, as Selina walked away. "You think she ought to have patience and charity with Kit. Why can't you have a little for her, instead of always poking her up?"

"Well, she puts on such airs. I like to make her show her true colors."

"You don't always make people show their true colors in that way," remarked Agnes. "Suppose I should slap your face, and make your eye all black and blue: would those be your true colors?"

"Well, no, perhaps not," returned Sarah, whose frankness was her most promising trait; "but then, you know, I don't pretend to equal St. Agnes." Sarah had read somewhere of a St. Agnes, and liked to tease Agnes with the name.

"I am not a saint. I wish I were," replied Agnes, coloring. "But I will tell you one thing, Sarah and Faith," she added, with an evident effort: "if by a saint you mean a true Christian, I am going to try and be one. I have been thinking about it a good while, and I made up my mind last night."

"Well, I only hope you will stick to it, that's all," said Sarah, while Faith got hold of Agnes's hand and squeezed it. "The trouble of these sudden conversions is, that people don't hold out."

"Well, I don't know; St. Paul held out pretty well, and so did St. John."

"Oh, well, they were saints."

"What *is* a saint, anyhow?" asked Faith. "I have heard the word all my life, and don't know, really, what it means."

"I thought a saint was a person who never did any thing wrong," said Sarah.

"Then I am sure none of the apostles were saints, for they all did wrong. Let us ask Miss Armstrong after reading-class. It will come in easily enough, for the lesson is about Polycarp, and he was called a saint, I know. Come, there is the bell."

Kit's ill temper, if it deserved so harsh a name, found vent in a flood of tears as soon as she reached her desk. She expected and half hoped that Miss Armstrong would scold her, and perhaps punish her; for bad language was justly looked upon as a grievous offence. But Miss Armstrong did nothing of the kind. She waited till the first violence of the storm had spent itself, and then said in that firm, kindly tone of hers, which somehow carried obedience with it, —

"There, Kitty, don't cry any more: you will only make yourself worse. Wash your face and hands, and then I should like to have you run down to the mill, and ask Mr. Bassett to send me some chalk; we are quite out. As to this trouble of yours, we will talk about it after school. You need not hurry; I will excuse you if you are a little late."

"How good she is!" thought Kit, with a feeling of absolute wonder, as she bathed her red eyes and aching head at the spring which boiled up in a corner of the yard. "Oh, if I could only be good, like that!"

As she was going out of the yard she met Faith, who spoke to her pleasantly.

"Where now, Kitty? Going home?"

"No; Miss Armstrong sent me of an errand." She was passing on when it occurred to her that here, at least, was something she might do. She called "Faith!" and as Faith turned back she said, with a quiver in her voice, "I am sorry I called you that name. It was real mean, for it was not your fault that I missed."

"Never mind," said Faith, kissing her. "I'm sure I don't bear malice. But, Kitty dear, I wouldn't say such words if I were you."

"I won't—not if I can help it; but you don't know how hard it is to be good."

"Don't I!" said Faith. "It is as hard for me as any one, I guess. But there, don't cry," for Kit's tears were running over once more: "I'm sure you won't do it again."

Kit went on her way with her heart greatly lightened. She found Mr. Bassett busy, as usual, but not too busy to lend an ear to her request.

"Chalk, eh? oh, yes; I've got plenty, if I can only find it. Let me see. Here's an apple for you, anyhow. If we don't find one thing, we find another, you see. Don't you want this little box to put your pencils and things in? Well, here's the chalk, finally, and plenty of it; and here is a little paper for you. Let me see; I didn't see any of your folks at the schoolhouse last night."

"No, sir; I wanted to go, but I knew they wouldn't let me. I did listen under the window, and uncle Phin did not like it a bit."

"Poor child!" said the miller kindly. "Well, well, you must take your troubles to the right place,

and you will find help somehow. You know that, don't you?"

"Yes, sir: I heard Miss Armstrong say so. But I must hurry back now, because she will want the chalk."

"Poor little young one!" repeated Mr. Bassett to himself. "I must talk over her case with ma, and see what can be done for her."

"Just in time, Kitty," said Miss Armstrong pleasantly, as Kit entered, somewhat out of breath. "Now, as you cannot very well do sums with your left hand, you may take this book, and learn the hymn I have marked; and we will hear you repeat it in the reading-class."

Kit took the book with pleasure, for she loved learning verses. The hymn was the time-honored one beginning, —

"Jesus Christ, my Lord and Saviour,
Once became a child like me."

"I suppose that is so," thought Kit as she laid down the book to repeat the first verse to herself. "He was just as old as I am, once; but He never would say such words.

'All my nature is unholy;
Pride and passion dwell within.'

"I'm sure *that* is true enough. But I don't see how I am to help it: the more I try, the worse I am. I never knew I was half so bad till I began to read in the Testament.

"'Lord, assist a feeble creature.'

"That means me, I am sure. There isn't any one more feeble than I am. 'Assist' means 'help,' I know. Oh, dear! I do wish He would help me." And Kit put her head down on the desk, and cried a little. But the tears did not scorch her eyes, like the others: they were cool, and seemed to take some of the weight off her heart which had lain there ever since the night before.

"Now we will have Kitty's hymn," said Miss Armstrong as the reading-lesson was finished; "and then, if there are any questions to be asked, I shall like to hear them."

All the girls looked at Kit, some of them expecting that she would refuse to obey. They were mistaken. Kit repeated her hymn with a somewhat unsteady voice, it is true, but without hesitation and without a single blunder. Then, with a visible effort, she said, —

"Please, Miss Armstrong, I am sorry I was so naughty in the spelling-class. I won't do so again."

"That is right, Kitty," said Miss Armstrong, much gratified. "But there is one thing more for you to do."

"Please, Miss Armstrong, she did tell me she was sorry," said Faith eagerly. "She said so in recess."

"So much the better. And you do forgive her, Faith, I am sure."

"Yes, indeed!" answered Faith heartily. "I didn't mind much about it, anyway. I don't believe she would have done it if she hadn't felt sick."

"That wasn't any excuse," said Kit. "I was just as cross as I could be."

"We will let the matter drop now," said Miss Armstrong. "I should like to talk with Kitty a few minutes after school. Now, are there any questions to be answered?"

"Please, Miss Armstrong, what is a saint?" asked Agnes.

"Can any one answer that question?" asked Miss Armstrong. "What is a saint?"

"A very good person; one that never does any thing wrong," said one of the girls rather doubtfully.

"That is what I said; but Faith thought it was not right, because the apostles all did wrong things."

"A saint is somebody who pretends to be better than other folks," said Lucinda Hurd, who always resented any praise bestowed on another person as so much taken from herself.

"I think not," said Miss Armstrong, "or St. Paul would hardly have told the Corinthians that they were called to be saints. He would not have told them that they were called upon to pretend to be better than their neighbors."

"Of course not," said Selina; "but I always thought a saint was somebody like the people we read about who went and lived in caves and hermitages, and never married, or had any families, or ate any meat."

"That will not answer the conditions, either," remarked Miss Armstrong, "because the Corinthian Christians were not called on to do any such thing as that."

"I can't remember that any one in the Bible was

called on to do that," remarked Faith. "But, Miss Armstrong, won't *you* tell us what a saint is?"

"I will tell you what I think," said Miss Armstrong. "A saint is a person whose life is consecrated to God; that is, given to Him to be His entirely. Or, to put it in other words, a saint is one who has made up his mind to serve God with all his powers of body and mind. Such a person may be faulty and imperfect, often stumbling and even falling; but he keeps his purpose always in view. When he falls, he confesses his sin, and asks forgiveness, and begins again, humbled but not discouraged. When he sees a duty, he strives to do it at whatever inconvenience or sacrifice to himself. He tries always to keep alive in his heart a sense of the presence of God and his Saviour, and to see every thing as they would see it. That is my idea of a saint."

"But could any one be like that?" asked Faith doubtfully.

"I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me" (Phil. iv. 13), quoted Miss Armstrong. "There is the secret, depend upon it. Now we must not talk any longer. Take this matter home, and think about it."

CHAPTER VII.

THE SPRINGING GRAIN.

"Now, Kitty, let us get at the bottom of all this trouble of ours," said Miss Armstrong. "Agnes, do you wish to see me?"

"Yes, please, Miss Armstrong. But I will wait: I haven't so far to go as Kit has. Or I don't know why I should mind speaking before her," said Agnes, coloring. "It isn't any thing I need be ashamed of. I have made up my mind to try to be a real Christian, Miss Armstrong. I don't know whether I shall have strength to persevere, but I am going to begin."

"You will surely have strength to persevere if you only look in the right place for it, my dear child," said Miss Armstrong, kissing her. "You don't know how glad I am to hear you say this, Agnes. Tell me, when did you make up your mind?"

"Last night, after I went home. I have been thinking a great deal about the matter lately, and somehow what that old lady said seemed to bring me right to the point. I seemed to realize that the Lord died for *me*, just as much as if there had been no one else to die for; and I couldn't hold out after that."

"You were led to see the truth, and the truth has made you free," said Miss Armstrong. "He did die for you, and for me, and for little Kitty here, just as much as if there had been no one else to die for; and He loves us as much as if He had no one else to love. Have you told your mother, Agnes?"

"No, ma'am; I am going to tell her to-night. Ma isn't a church-member herself, but I think she will be glad. She always wants me to go to church and Sunday school, and she never would let me go walking on Sundays with Milly Richmond. Oh, dear! I wish the Richmonds were not coming."

"Don't borrow trouble, dear child. Trust your best Friend to do what is best for you, and make all things work together for your good. I will talk with you again as soon as I can. Good-night."

"Who do you mean by Agnes's best friend?" asked Kit, as Agnes left the room.

"Her Father in heaven, and her Saviour," answered Miss Armstrong; "you know I told you that before, Kitty."

"Well," said Kit with a deep sigh, "I wish He was my friend, that's all; but I don't think He is."

"Why not, my poor child?"

"If He had been, He wouldn't have let Melissa put uncle Phin up to shake me, and burn my book, all because—I"—The recital of her wrongs was too much for poor Kit, and she burst into a fresh agony of crying. Miss Armstrong took her on her lap, pressed the hot head against her bosom, and by and by began gently to soothe and check the outburst.

"Tell me all about it," said she when Kit was quiet enough to speak. Kit sobbed out the story of her wrongs.

"And you think He does not love you, because He lets you have trouble? My dear, that is a great mistake. He has never promised us freedom from trouble in this world: on the contrary, He has expressly said, 'In the world ye shall have tribulation.' But He adds in the same breath, 'Be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.' He says in another place that He sends us trouble, or lets trouble come, to make us more fit for heaven, just as the kindest parents sometimes punish their children."

"Then I don't see how Christians are any better off than other folks, after all," said Kit, "if they have troubles just the same."

"They don't have them *just* the same, Kitty. It is not just the same whether a child is a slave, and beaten by a cruel master, or whether it is punished to cure it of its faults by a kind and loving father."

"That is so," answered Kit.

"And there is another thing about it," continued Miss Armstrong. "Suppose I should say to you, 'Kitty, if you will bear all your troubles patiently, and do your work as well as you can for one week, then I will take you home to live with me, and be happy all the rest of your life,' would the time seem long or hard to you then?"

"No, indeed!" said Kit, with kindling eyes. "I would work my fingers to the bone, and never say a word, whatever happened."

"Well, that is the way our Father treats his chil-

dren. He lets them have plenty of trouble and sorrow here, — sometimes it seems as if the best people had the most of it, — but He promises them a home with Him in heaven, where they shall never know any pain and grief, but be happy and holy for ever and ever. Just think ! when we look back on our present life, after we have been in that blessed place a million years, it will not look very long or very hard to us.”

“No, indeed !” said Kit, drawing a long breath. “A million years without any trouble ; happy all the time ! It just takes my breath away.”

“And then to be no nearer the end than before,” said Miss Armstrong. “I used to hear an old hymn sung, of which this was the last verse, —

“‘When I’ve been there ten thousand days,
Bright shining as the sun,
I’ve just as long to sing God’s praise
As though I’d just begun.’”

“Yes, it is nice for you, and I am glad you are going there,” said Kit, her face darkening again ; “but it won’t do *me* any good. *I* shall never get there, I know.”

“And why not, my little girl ?”

“I shall never be good enough,” answered Kit. “I have tried and tried to be good. Every morning since I came to school I have said to myself, ‘Now, I won’t do one wrong thing to-day ;’ and I do all the time. And, if I don’t act wrong things, I think them. I never can be like what it says in the Testament, — like what He was.”

“Poor Kitty ! I don’t wonder you are discouraged. Why, my child, if people were to be saved by their own goodness, there would not be one in paradise at this minute. It is because Christ died for us, that we are saved ; because He bore our sins for us when He was nailed to the cross ; because He died for us, and rose from the dead for us, and pleads for us at the right hand of God. We are not to be saved because we are good, but we are to be good because we are saved.”

Kit’s face brightened a little. “I don’t quite understand,” said she.

“It is just this, Kitty : you have not to earn eternal happiness. You never could do that, and you have no need to try. The Lord Jesus has done that for you. He bore the punishment of all our sins when He was here on earth ; and what we have to do is, to believe that He has done so, to put our trust in Him, and give ourselves to Him to be His. See what the Bible says about it : ‘God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life’ (St. John iii. 16) ; ‘God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us’ (Rom. v. 8) ; ‘He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life’ (St. John iii. 36).”

“Then all the goodness is in believing,” said Kit.

“Not at all, my dear. There is no more goodness in believing than in any thing else ; but we shall not ask Him to save us unless we believe He can do it. Just so, you might be drowning, and some one might

throw you a rope: unless you believed that the rope would save you, you would not take hold of it; and yet there would be no goodness in taking hold of it."

"I see now!" exclaimed Kit: "just as there might be a doctor in Oldbury who could cure aunt Martha; but unless uncle Phin believed it, and went after him, he would be of no use to her. But, Miss Armstrong, will God save *me* like that?" asked Kit with a tone of deep reverence, and a far-off look in her great blue eyes. "Will He do all that just because I ask Him, — a poor little naughty, ignorant girl, like me, that don't know any thing about Him hardly? It seems too good to be true."

"It is not one bit too good to be true. You have only to ask Him, and the work is done, now and forever."

"And won't I ever do any thing wrong again?"

"I cannot say that, Kitty. As long as we are in the world, we have to fight with temptations from without, and with the sinful nature that is born in us. But, if we are faithful in asking, He will give us strength to conquer; and, if we do fall into sin, He will help us out. 'If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness' (1 John i. 9). He not only forgives us our sins, but He washes them away, and makes them as if they had never been. Only God can do that."

"I can see that," said Kit. "Men can't make the least thing to be as if it had never been, if they are ever so sorry about it." She sat still a moment, and

then turned to her friend with a great light shining in her sweet face.

"Well, then, Miss Armstrong, I don't see but I *am* saved, after all; because I do want Him to save me, and I do believe He can."

"Then you certainly are, my precious child," said Miss Armstrong, her own eyes overflowing. "Let us thank Him, Kitty, for all His goodness."

About an hour after this conversation, two young ladies, walking over the hill, came to Kit's favorite haunt, and stood still in admiration at the picture presented to them. Kit was lying on the ground, her head pillowed on the mossy flat stone which was her favorite seat, fast asleep. Her hat lay on the grass beside her, her long dark lashes rested on her cheeks, and the soft summer wind was gently playing with her black curls, as if it feared to wake her. It almost seemed from her attitude that she had been kneeling by the stone, and had sunk down overpowered with sleep.

"What an exquisite picture!" whispered Amity. "What a pity Percy is not here with her sketch-book."

"It is lovely," answered Ida in the same tone. "But she ought not to lie there: she will take cold. Her hand is hurt too. Poor little dear, I wonder who she is. I am sure I don't know her, and yet it seems as if I had seen her before."

"I was just thinking the same. But we must not leave her here. She might sleep till dark, and awake frightened out of her senses, and with rheumatic fever into the bargain."

As Amity spoke, she bent down and kissed the little sleeper. Kit awoke, and started to her feet with a little cry of pain, as the sudden movement shook her burned hand.

"My poor child, did you hurt yourself?" said Amity kindly. "I am sorry I gave you such a start. I only meant to wake you, and keep you from getting cold. What ails your arm?"

"I burned it; but it is not very bad now, only I twisted it a little, getting up," answered Kit. "I can't think how I came to go to sleep, only I was so tired. Ain't you the lady that sung at the meeting last night?" she ventured to ask shyly.

"Yes, my dear. Were you there?"

"No, ma'am; but I stood under the window and listened. Uncle won't let me go to meeting. He don't believe in God or any such thing."

"And don't you believe in Him?"

"Yes, ma'am, I do," answered Kit, with a quiet decision which made Ida and Amity exchange glances. "I feel as though I had just *got* to believe in Him; for He's all the friend I've got, only Miss Armstrong and Symantha."

"He is the best you could have. What is your name?"

"Kit Mallory, ma'am; at least, that is what every one calls me, only Miss Armstrong calls me Kitty."

"Well, Kitty, can you direct us a short way to Mrs. Van Zandt's house? We have walked farther than we meant, and are both tired."

"You are near by now," said Kit; "you can see the house when you are past this ledge, and I'll

show you a cow-path that goes close by the barn. Wouldn't you like a drink?" she added; "this is real nice water, and I've got a cup I keep here."

"Thank you, that will be very refreshing," said Amity. Kit produced her cup, washed it in the stream, and filled it at the spring-head. Both the girls drank, and praised the cool, sweet draught.

"What a lovely spring!" said Amity, bending down to look into its depths.

"It has great bubbles in it," said Kit. "If you watch, you will see one presently. There! isn't that pretty?"

"It is, indeed," said Amity. "Look, Ida."

"I see," replied Ida, bending down in her turn. "I see, too, that the sun is getting low, and aunt Barbara will be uneasy about us. So this is the way, is it?"

"Yes, ma'am. Keep in the path, and you won't get into any of the soft places."

"Thank you, my dear. Good-night."

As Kit bent over the spring to dip a cup of water for herself, she saw something red and golden lying under the great tuft of lady-fern which partly overhung the water. She picked it up. It was a beautifully bound little book, bearing marks of a great deal of careful wear; and, on opening it, Kit saw that it was a New Testament.

Her heart gave a great bound at the sight. She had been asking for a Testament before she went to sleep, and here it was. Then came another thought. One of the young ladies must have dropped it. Kit could read writing. She turned to the fly-leaf, and

read, written in a clear though somewhat tremulous hand, —

“Amity, with mother’s love, on her tenth birthday.”

Underneath was written, in another hand, “The very day my dear mother died.”

“It is that plain young lady’s, the one they say is so rich,” thought Kit. “Well, she can buy plenty more, and I haven’t any. But then she must think every thing of it, because her mother gave it to her. Oh, dear! I wish I knew what to do. It does seem as though I ought to have it.”

Just then something seemed to whisper in Kit’s ear a verse she had read in her own Testament only the day before, — “Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them.”

“*He* said that,” said Kit, speaking aloud. “Suppose *I* had a Testament that mother gave me, and I should lose it, and some one should find it.”

Kit did not hesitate another moment. She ran down the hill as fast as she could, and overtook the young ladies just at their own gate.

“Why, here is our little friend again,” said Amity. “My dear child, how you have put yourself out of breath!”

“Isn’t this yours?” asked Kit, producing the book. “I found it down by the spring.”

“It is, indeed!” replied Amity. “My dear child, how can I thank you enough? I would rather have lost almost any thing else that I possess.”

“I thought you would be sorry to lose it, because it had your mother’s writing in it,” said Kit, feeling



very happy as Amity kissed her. "I know, if I had a Testament that my mother gave me, how much I would think of it. But I must hurry home."

"Wait a minute," said Amity. "Kitty, I want to give you something, not as a reward, but as a keepsake. What shall it be?"

Kit's carnation cheeks grew more beautiful than ever, between eagerness and bashfulness.

"If it wouldn't be impudent to ask, if you had a little old Testament you could give me," she said.

"Would you rather have a little one than a large one?" asked Amity.

"Yes, because I could hide it easier."

"Wait just a moment," said Amity. "So she has to hide her Testament," she remarked to Ida as they went into the house.

"They are a dreadfully hard family, from all I hear," answered Ida. "One of aunt Barbara's soft-covered Testaments will be just the thing for her."

Mrs. Barbara Van Zandt was sitting by the parlor window, hemming a napkin with an exquisite overhand hem. She was almost always hemming napkins when she was not buying them or packing them in neat parcels to send away, and she had brought abundance of her favorite fancy-work with her to the country.

"You are late," said she as the girls entered. "I began to think you were lost."

"So we were," said Ida; "and I don't know where we should have landed, only for a little girl—such an odd, lovely child!—whom we found asleep on the hill-top."

"And, aunt Barbara, will you give me one of your nice Testaments for her?" added Amity. "She says she would rather have a little Testament than any thing; but it must be a small one, because she has to hide it."

Aunt Barbara rose with alacrity. "Poor child, how sad! Yes, I have just the thing for her. In that cupboard by the fireplace, Amity. No, not that; the one with soft covers. Where is the child?"

"Out by the door," answered Amity. "She says she dare not come in. Do come and look at her, aunt Barbara, and tell us who she is like."

"So you are the little girl who would rather have a Testament than any thing," said Mrs. Van Zandt in those peculiar deep, soft tones of hers. "Well, here is a nice one for you. Look up, my dear."

"Who is she like, aunt?" asked Ida. "I can't think, and I am sure I have seen that face before."

"Do you remember the picture which hangs in my sewing-room at home?" asked Mrs. Van Zandt. "She is the living image of my poor lost Kathleen Joyce."

"Please, ma'am, would you say that name again?" asked Kit, trembling with eagerness.

"Kathleen Joyce," repeated Mrs. Van Zandt. "Did you ever hear the name before?"

"That was my name! That was it!" exclaimed Kit exultingly. "Kathleen, that is it! I knew it was not Keturah, I knew it wasn't."

"Kathleen? Kathleen what?" asked Mrs. Van Zandt as eagerly as herself.

"I don't know. I mustn't stay another minute,"

said Kit in a tone of alarm as the clock struck. "I forgot uncle Phin told me never to come here."

"Don't keep her, Mrs. Van Zandt," said Aggy, an elderly colored woman who had taken care of the house for years, speaking in an undertone. "He is an awful man, and there is no telling what he might do."

"Well, good-night, dear child. Perhaps we shall meet again. I must see her somehow," added Mrs. Van Zandt, looking after Kit as she hurried away. "If she is not Kathleen Joyce's child, there is nothing in resemblances."

"And she said her name was Kathleen," observed Ida. "How strange!"

"I wonder if this man is really her uncle," said Amity.

"Melissa Mallory says not," replied Aggy. "She says her father took Kit from the poorhouse, but there is no telling any thing by that. — Miss Ida, do come in out of the dew, and let your aunt get her tea. She'll be having one of her headaches again, and your hand will be paining you all night."

"Kathleen, Kathleen," repeated Mrs. Van Zandt as she sat down to the table. "I must contrive to see that child again."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE SNAKES.

"WHERE is Miss Armstrong?" asked Mrs. Weston, as Selina came home alone.

"I suppose she will be here presently," answered Selina. "Kit Mallory was naughty, and she kept her after school. I would never do that: I would whip them, and let them go. I wouldn't punish myself too."

"That would be very well if one thought only of one's own convenience," remarked Mrs. Weston, "but I imagine that is not Miss Armstrong's way. What did Kit do?"

"She called Faith Fletcher bad names because Faith went above her in spelling. I hope Miss Armstrong will have enough of her, that's all."

Mrs. Weston gave Selina a look which checked her, before she said, "Poor Kit needs to have allowance made for her. She has had very few advantages. But you may set the table, Selina; I dare say Miss Armstrong will not be long."

Selina had not really meant to tell an untruth, —that is to say, she had not deliberately said to

herself that she would tell a lie : that is something which people seldom do, — nor had she told a lie in direct words. It was in consequence of her naughtiness that Kit had staid after school. But Selina was under the dominion of what might be called her ruling passion, — a passion which makes people do as mean things as any which belongs to humanity : she was jealous. She had taken a great liking to Miss Armstrong when that lady first came, and had said to herself, that, as Miss Armstrong boarded at her father's house, she (Selina) would see more of her than any one else, and would therefore be the teacher's particular friend. Now, there was no harm in Selina's wishing the teacher to like her ; the trouble was, that she did not want Miss Armstrong to like any one else. This passion of jealousy had been the bane of Selina's life. Mr. and Mrs. Weston had another adopted daughter, who had married and gone to live in Oldbury about a year before our story begins. Elizabeth had never been any thing but kind to Selina from the first day of her coming into the house, a rather forlorn little girl of ten years old. It had not given her a single pang when she was told of Mr. and Mrs. Weston's determination to adopt another child : on the contrary, she was glad that some one else should have the same happy home as herself. And when Selina was brought from the Oldbury orphan-asylum, the only home she could remember, Elizabeth, then a womanly girl of sixteen, had done her best to make her feel contented. But no kindness can make a jealous person happy. In the asylum Selina had always watched the other chil-

dren's meals, to see whether some one had not a larger bit of butter, a fatter doughnut, a redder apple, than herself; and she brought the same spirit into her new home. She soon became quite sure that mother loved Lizzy the best, all because Lizzy had curly hair and red cheeks. Lizzy had a new summer frock, while hers was mother's last summer's dress made over; Lizzy had mother's beautiful gray merino made over for winter, while she had a woollen plaid out of the store at the Corners: and one was just as much a grievance as the other. She was glad when Lizzy married and went away; but now Lizzy had a boy baby which was named after Mr. Weston, and Selina was quite sure that father and mother would never care for her again. Miss Armstrong had been very kind to her, that she must needs allow; but then, she had been just as kind to all the others, and Selina was quite sure that she liked Agnes Gleason's reading the best. That was always the way, she said to herself with a sigh. It was her fate, and she must bear it. Some time, perhaps, she would find some one who would love her best of all.

"So you had a case of discipline," remarked Mrs. Weston as the family sat down to the tea-table.

"I thought you'd find it wasn't all such plain sailing," said Aunt Betsy Burr, who had happened in to borrow a cup of maple molasses. Aunt Betsy's errands generally did bring her to her neighbors about meal-times. "There's some dreadful bad children about here. Those Bassett boys yelled right in front of my door last night when they were coming home from hoeing potatoes up to the hill farm."

"It was not a case of discipline, though it might have been if the culprit had not put discipline out of the question by her own act," replied Miss Armstrong. "The poor child did forget herself; but she acknowledged her fault, and asked pardon before the whole school, and that of her own motion. There was no room for discipline after that. I did keep her, but it was to comfort and help her a little. She has burned her hand badly, and was feeling very unhappy over the loss of an old Testament she had found somewhere."

Mrs. Weston looked at Selina, who looked at her plate.

"I am sorry for that child. I think she has hard times," said Mr. Weston. "I met Phin Mallory at Oldbury yesterday, and he told me he was going to make a fuss at the next school-meeting about having the Bible read in school."

"And what did you say?" asked his wife.

"Well, I tried to reason with him at first; but I found there was no use in that, so I told him to make all the fuss he wanted to."

"I don't know, though," said Aunt Betsy. "I ain't sure it is lawful to take up the time of the scholars with Bible lessons."

Miss Armstrong only smiled.

"And so poor Kit has lost her Testament," remarked Mr. Weston. "Well, we must try to let her have another. Does she think so much of it as all that?"

"She does, indeed," answered Miss Armstrong. "I have never met any one who seemed to have a

greater craving for the truth. I believe that child is going to grow up a true Christian in spite of her adverse circumstances."

"I should think she took a queer way to show it, — calling the other girls names," said Aunt Betsy. "For my part, I don't believe she will ever be any thing but a regular little reprobate."

"Who is calling names now, Aunt Betsy?" asked Mr. Weston, smiling.

Aunt Betsy maintained a dignified silence, and betook herself to the consumption of canned cherries as if that were the only object in life worthy her notice.

"The truth often finds readier entrance into such a heart as Kit's than into one which had heard the gospel preached, and remained closed against it," remarked Miss Armstrong; "at least, that has been the result of my observation both with the heathen and among the mission children in the city."

"You are right," said Mr. Weston. "The hardest sinners to melt are gospel-hardened sinners. I thought a good many people seemed touched last night. The Jewsbury girls were very attentive, I observed, and so was Agnes Gleason. That is another child I feel great interest in."

"I must not violate confidence, but I may just say I have reason to hope we may hear good news of Agnes," said Miss Armstrong, smiling. "I had a nice little talk with her, which was another thing that kept me."

"Well, I hope her mother won't put no stumbling-blocks in her way if she really is trying to

be a Christian, that's all," remarked Aunt Betsy. "Almira is a dreadful worldly woman, and always was. The way she *nips* into church on Sunday with that black silk dress of hers, and brushes off the seat before she sits down! You needn't laugh, Abby. I've seen her do it with my own eyes, so there!"

"I don't so much blame her for that," said Mrs. Weston. "I never go into the building, that I don't want to go to house-cleaning."

"Wouldn't it be fun to make a *bee*, and clean the church before the new minister comes?" said Selina. "We might do it next week."

"I declare, daughter, that is an excellent idea," said Mrs. Weston. "It wouldn't be such a very great piece of work if we all took hold of it. — What do you say, father?"

"I agree with all my heart," answered Mr. Weston. "I don't believe the place has had a thorough cleaning in twelve years, and it is longer than that since the old house was painted. How long is it, Aunt Betsy?"

"Twenty-five years this coming July," answered Aunt Betsy. "Don't you remember, it was the year old Dr. Munson died. He *was* a man! It will be a long time before we have any one to fill his pulpit. This Mr. Brace isn't going to do it. Why, Dr. Munson's folks were among the first settlers of Oldfield County."

"Well, if you come to that, Mr. Brace's great-grandfather was one of the first settlers of Rivermouth County," said Mr. Weston. "You may find his

name in Barber's 'Historical Collections.' Though, as he is to preach, and not his great-grandfather, I don't see what difference it makes."

"Well, anyhow, he ain't going to fill Dr. Munson's pulpit," persisted Aunt Betsy. "Just hear him read the lessons! And he sings himself, for I saw him."

"And I heard him, and thought he had a very fine voice. Why shouldn't he sing, as well as any one else?"

"Dr. Munson never did. I remember him as if I had seen him yesterday."

"Dr. Munson was a fine man, no doubt; but he has been dead and buried this many a year, and I only wish his ghost did not walk," said Mrs. Weston. "Every time we have a new minister, somebody compares him with old Dr. Munson, and says he never will fill Dr. Munson's pulpit."

"If Dr. Munson wanted to keep the pulpit himself, he should have taken it away with him," said Selina rather pertly.

"I don't believe he did," said her father. "He was by far too good and too humble-minded to wish to remain a standard for the measurement of all who should come after him. — But, as to this plan of the child's, mother, you talk it up with the women, and I'll do the same with the men; and we'll see what can be done."

Selina went to her room in a comfortable frame of mind. She had escaped the blame which she had expected, and she had been commended for her idea of cleaning the church, and might expect still more praise, for her mother would be sure to say it was

Selina's notion in the first place. Her self-complacency began to sink a little as she heard her mother coming up stairs, and remembered how she had misrepresented the matter of Kit's staying after school.

"Now mother Weston will be coming to talk to me," she said to herself. She had a great dread of these *talks*, which always left her feeling very small in her own eyes. But mother Weston had no such intention this night. She began to think there was no use in talking to Selina: so, like Christian in the dark valley, she betook herself to another weapon, called All-prayer, which was very familiar to her hand, as it is, thank God! to the hands of most Christian mothers. Selina was destined to hear of her fault from another quarter.

"Selina, how did Mrs. Burr know about Kitty's fault yesterday?" asked Miss Armstrong as they met on the way to school next morning. Selina had not been without her fears on this point, and she had set out before Miss Armstrong by a different route expressly to escape this interview; but, as so often happens when we try to avoid a person, she came plump upon her about a quarter of a mile from the schoolhouse.

"Oh, Aunt Betsy — every one calls her Aunt Betsy about here — she hears every thing!" answered Selina with assumed carelessness. "And she thinks all young people are dreadful. You heard what she said about the Bassett boys, and they are forever doing things for her."

"Yes, I heard; but that is not the point," said Miss Armstrong, seeing Selina's object, but not to

be diverted from her purpose. "Your mother, too, spoke of a case of discipline. What did you say about it?"

"I am sure I don't remember," answered Selina. "Mother asked me where you were, and I said you had staid after school with Kit Mallory. Then she asked what Kit had done, and I told her. I did not see that Aunt Betsy was there, or I should not have said it. Why, Miss Armstrong, don't you want me to tell mother what happens in school?" asked Selina, thinking she saw a way of "getting out of it," as she said. "I always do tell mother every thing."

"And you are careful to tell her every thing just exactly as it happens, of course," said Miss Armstrong, with a look which made Selina feel that she was seen through. "For instance, you told her last night that Kit had of her own accord confessed her fault, and made all the amends possible, before I said a word to her on the subject."

"I didn't say any thing but what was true," said Selina somewhat sullenly.

"Yes, but did you tell all the truth? It is possible to deceive even by silence; and it is the deception that makes the lie, you know, my dear."

"I will thank you not to call me a liar, Miss Armstrong," said Selina, feeling that she was in a tight place, and trying to get out of it by means of a fit of virtuous indignation. "That is what nobody ever did; and I am not going to stand it, even from you."

"I have not called you a liar, Selina, as you know very well. What your own conscience tells you, is another matter. Only remember this, that, while I

make no objection to your telling your mother every thing that concerns yourself, I shall be very much displeased if I hear of any gossip outside about matters that go on in school."

With these words Miss Armstrong went into the schoolhouse, leaving Selina very angry with the teacher, herself, and all the world. There is nothing so exasperating as an accusing conscience when one is determined not to listen to it. Selina had no mind either to join Miss Armstrong in the schoolhouse, or to be left to the company of her own thoughts; and, seeing the Fletcher children coming down the road in company with Myra Bassett, she went to meet them.

"Why, Myra, are you coming to school?" she asked in surprise, for Myra was a grown-up girl, and had been to boarding-school in Oldbury.

"Well, no; at least, I am not going to begin Saturday morning, though I am not sure I should not do it if ma could spare me," answered Myra, smiling. "I have taken a great liking to your Miss Armstrong. I think you are greatly favored in having her for a teacher."

"I guess we all think so, don't we, Selina?" said Faith.

"Of course, though I don't see any thing so very wonderful about her," answered Selina. "But all new brooms sweep clean, with some people."

"Why, what is the matter now?" asked Sarah Leet. "I am sure you began with thinking her a regular *tarragon*, as poor James Davis says. What has she done to you?"

"I did not say she had done any thing to me," answered Selina somewhat angrily. "I can have my own opinion, I suppose. I haven't any fault to find with Miss Armstrong, only I do think she makes a ridiculous fuss over that little Kit Mallory."

"Oh!" said Sarah in a tone which implied, "Now I understand."

"I don't see that she makes any great fuss over her," said literal Faith. "Of course we all feel interested in Kit. I don't know how any one could help it, seeing how hard she tries to be good. Wasn't it sweet to hear her ask pardon in the class, as she did yesterday?"

"Oh, very sweet," answered Selina with what she meant to be a tone of sarcasm, but which was, in fact, an ill-natured sneer. "She thought she was going to get a whipping, and took that way to get out of it, and get round Miss Armstrong."

"Well, I don't believe that," said Agnes Gleason, who had joined the group in time to hear the remark. "In the first place, Kit gets too many whippings to care very much about them; and, in the second place, she couldn't possibly know that she would get out of it in that way. I believe she really was sorry, and said so."

"I think so too," returned Faith.

"And so do I," said Sarah. "But, Agnes, I didn't expect to see you so early, or looking so happy."

"Why not? Oh, I know: because the Richmonds have come. Well, mother says I shall not be hindered as I was last summer. She told Mrs. Richmond last night that she and Milly must get up to

breakfast with us at half-past seven, as she could not keep me at home to cook a second breakfast. Wasn't I glad!"

"And what did Mrs. Richmond say?"

"Oh, she didn't like it at first, and talked about finding another boarding-place; and mother told her she could do as she pleased about that. I don't think she would be very sorry if they did go, only we all like poor Cordelia."

"And is poor Cordelia to get up at half-past seven too?" asked Selina. "That is rather hard, I think, considering what bad nights she has."

"Of course not," replied Agnes with some indignation in her tone. "Cordelia always has her breakfast in bed, and never takes any thing anyway but a cup of tea and a bit of bread or toast. That is a very different thing from getting a second hot breakfast, an hour after we have finished our own, for two healthy women."

"Very different," said Sarah; "but I thought Milly alone would be enough to bring a cloud to your placid brow, as the magazine-writers say."

"Oh, well, perhaps I have been hard upon Amelia," replied Agnes. "She does come across me in so many ways, she makes me feel like a cat stroked the wrong way. But I don't mean to quarrel with her if I can help it. There comes Kit. How pale she looks! I wonder if her arm is so bad."

At this moment the conversation was disagreeably interrupted. It is a fact that Oldfield County, and especially the town of Oldham, has always enjoyed, and, what is worse, has deserved, a very bad reputa-

tion in the matter of snakes. It is a snaky town at all times; and there are certain years, when, for some reason unknown, snakes do much more abound than at other times. This was a "snake summer." The men wore their thickest and highest boots when they went into the mowing-lots and the low meadows, and the children were cautioned to keep a bright lookout in their expeditions after wintergreens and wild flowers. Mr. Bassett had killed a big rattlesnake in his own pasture; there were stories of copperheads; and old Miss Jewsbury declared that she had seen a serpent as thick as a clothes-post and as long as a well-sweep, crossing the swamp at the foot of her garden. But Miss Jewsbury was given to seeing wonderful sights under the inspiration of a certain black vial in the corner of her cupboard, and nobody believed very deeply in the accuracy of her snake story.

The Fletcher twins, Eddy and Eben, had run on before to meet Kit, who was a famous playmate, and very fond of the younger children. Just as they came near her, Ednah stood still literally, and, fortunately for herself, too much scared to move; while Eben screamed, —

"A snake, a snake! O Faithie, come!"

Faith stopped, frozen with horror, and pointed to the child. A brown snake had actually wound itself round her ankle. Before any one could move, Kit turned, saw the situation, and was mistress of it.

"Don't move, Eddy; stand still!" said she in a crisp, clear tone of command. Then, reaching the spot with one of her agile, panther-like springs, she

bent down, caught the snake with her thumb and forefinger just behind the head, and, throwing it on the ground, set the heel of her thick boot on its head.¹

"Quick, girls!" she cried. "Kill it before it gets away."

Agnes and Sarah sprang to the spot, and the snake was soon despatched. Faith snatched up Ednah, and began stripping down her stocking.

"Oh, it didn't bite her: it didn't have a chance," said Kit, with a laugh that sounded slightly hysterical. "But it was a close shave, wasn't it, Eddy?"

"I should think it was, you dear, blessed child!" exclaimed Sarah, sitting down on a stone, and taking Kit on her lap. "There, sit still a minute. How you tremble! and no wonder. — Agnes, get her some water."

"I don't think there is any thing to be so scared at," said Selina. "It was only a garter snake."

"Garter snake! So are you a garter snake!" said Sarah contemptuously. "Did you ever see a garter snake that color? — Mr. Bassett!" she added, calling to the miller, who was just passing, "please come and tell us what kind of snake this is."

"It's a real copperhead, and no mistake," pronounced Mr. Bassett. "It is rather a young one, but there is no mistaking the nature of the animal. See its poison teeth. Take care! don't touch 'em: the least scratch might do for you. Who killed it?"

Agnes told the story, while Miss Armstrong

¹ This is no fiction, but an actual incident.

fanned Kit, who was leaning, very white, against Sarah's shoulder.

"Well, you are a brave child," said Mr. Bassett. "How came you to think of acting so?"

"I didn't think: it just came to me," said Kit, sitting up. "I can't think what makes me feel so queer, only I didn't sleep much, my hand hurt me so."

"There isn't one man in a hundred would have had the presence of mind, even if he had the courage," said Mr. Bassett. "Myra, hadn't we better take her over to our house, and let her lie down a while? I'll carry her."

"Perhaps that will be the best way," said Miss Armstrong. "Wouldn't you like to go with Mr. Bassett, and rest a little?"

"And have a nice cup of coffee?" added Myra.

Kit shook her head. "I should like it," said she, with a loving and grateful look at Myra and her father, "but uncle Phin wouldn't. He has told me never to go into the neighbors' houses for any thing, and I think I ought to mind him."

"Of course you ought," replied Mr. Bassett, exchanging glances with Miss Armstrong.

"I'll run home and get the coffee, anyway," said Myra, whose kindness, like her mother's, was apt to take a substantial form. "I am sure she needs something."

"And do you sit quietly here in the shade, and rest," said Miss Armstrong. "Sarah shall sit with you, lest you should be faint again."

"What do you think about Kit now?" asked

Agnes of Selina, in a low tone, as they were hanging up their hats.

"I think a great fuss is being made about nothing," said Selina. "I or anybody could have done as much."

"Why didn't you, then?" asked one of the little girls, who was near. "You were as close to Eddy as Kit was; and you just stood still and screamed, for I saw you."

Selina found it convenient not to hear this remark. She was listening to the hissing of a snake in her own heart, worse than any copperhead that ever crawled in Oldham, — the serpent of envy and jealousy. The copperhead could, at worst, only have killed the child's body; but her bosom companion was poisoning her very soul.

"Don't I tire you?" said Kit as Sarah settled her into an easier position.

"Not you, you little shrimp; I could hold a dozen of you. Sit still if you like it."

"I do," said Kit. "It seems so good to be *babied* a little," she added with a little tremor in her voice.

Sarah drew Kit's head closer to her, and kissed the brown cheek; but she did not speak, and Kit lay in a kind of dreamy content.

"Sarah," said she at last, rousing herself just as she seemed to be falling asleep.

"Well, dear."

"Do you think it was the Lord put it into my head, — how to catch the snake, I mean?"

"I suppose so," answered Sarah, who was a girl who thought about things. "Every thing good is

from Him. I don't see where else it could have come from."

"I am so glad I could do it," said Kit. "How dreadful it would have been if the snake had bitten Eddy! She might have been dead by this time."

"And suppose it had bitten you?"

"Well, that wouldn't have mattered so much, for I am not anybody's girl as Eddy is. I suppose Symantha would have been sorry, though, because she loves me. She said she did, yesterday."

"She must be a queer woman if she didn't," said Sarah. "See, here is Myra with some nice coffee for you."

"Did you think I was ever so long?" said Myra, setting down her basket, and taking the cover off a little tin pail which gave out a delicious odor. "Ma made fresh coffee, and cut some cold chicken, because she says you ought to try and eat a little. There, drink, little one. What are you looking at?" For Kit was regarding the mug Myra handed her, with a dazed expression, knitting her brows as if trying to recall something.

"At the mug," said Kit. "Somehow it makes me remember something, and I can't tell what it is. It is just as if I had seen it before. I remember those little blue folks on the bridge, and somebody telling me a story about them."

"I dare say you may have seen something like it," said Myra. "It is very old china. Ma's grandfather used to be a sailor, and he brought a great many curious things from China and India. There, do drink your coffee: it will be cold."

"How good it is, and how good you all are to me!" said Kit. "I am so glad uncle Phin came here to live! I hope we shall never move away. Symantha says so too. She says she has been about the world all she ever wants to."

"Then you have moved a good many times?" said Sarah, who shared in the general curiosity about Phin Mallory, — a curiosity not at all unnatural in a place where everybody knew everybody, and everybody's grandfathers, to the third and fourth generation.

"Oh, yes! We have lived in five different places since I can remember. St. Louis was the first I know. Then we went farther west to a new town in Kansas, and then into the Indian country. I liked it there."

"Were you not afraid of the Indians?" asked Myra, whose notions of that people were derived from legends of the French and Indian war, still current in Oldfield County. "I should be."

"Oh, no, you wouldn't, not of those Indians. They were real nice folks, and so kind to us, especially when aunt Martha was sick. They were good Christians too. Uncle Phin was away a good deal; and sometimes, when he staid over Sunday, I used to go to their church. I was very little then; but I remember the beautiful singing, and the prayers they used, — little bits of them. 'We have strayed like lost sheep,' that was one; I knew it the minute Mr. Weston read it last night. And the people used to say, 'Good Lord, deliver us,' when the minister prayed. But we didn't stay there long. Uncle Phin

says the Indians are treacherous dogs, no better than wolves; but I like them."

"Have some more coffee," said Myra. "Well, where did you go then?"

"We didn't stay long anywhere; we just travelled about. Finally we came here, and I do hope we shall stay!"

"So do I," said Myra. "You must learn all you can, in case you have to go away again. Do you feel better?"

"Oh, yes! I am quite well now. I guess I will go into school. Thank you for the coffee and for being so good to me."

"Please ask Miss Armstrong to step to the door," said Myra, gathering up her basket and other matters. "Mother sent me on an errand to her, and I nearly forgot it." Myra's errand was, to ask Miss Armstrong to come to her mother's house to tea that afternoon.

"Mrs. Weston is coming, and so are Miss Celia and Miss Delia: that's all, only I suppose Aunt Betsy will turn up, as usual; oh, yes! and Patience Fletcher, if she can get away. Do come, Miss Armstrong: ma wants to see you so much, and I want you to see grandma. She is such a dear old lady!"

Miss Armstrong smiled, and promised to come. She would have preferred to spend her half-holiday quietly; but she knew this party was made for her, and she had been used, all her life, to putting herself out of the question.

Of course all the children went home with their heads and mouths full of the snake story, which lost

nothing in the telling. Kit was the only one who did not mention it. Agnes Gleason told of it at the table. She had gone to her mother's room the evening before, and opened her heart to her with some misgivings, for Mrs. Gleason was not a woman who made any profession of religion. She was agreeably surprised at the way in which her communication was received.

"I am just as glad as if you had given me a fortune, and more," said Mrs. Gleason. "I always have hoped you would be a Christian."

"You never said any thing about it to me, ma," said Agnes. "I've wondered sometimes why you didn't."

"Well, I thought it wouldn't sound very well coming from one who made no profession of religion herself; but you know, Agnes, I always have kept you at Sunday school, and I have taken pains to have you learn your catechism."

"Yes, I know. Mrs. Martin used to say she wished all mothers would do as much. I'm so glad you are pleased, ma. It makes me happier than I was before," said Agnes, her eyes overflowing with joyful tears.

"Well, I *am* pleased," said Mrs. Gleason with emphasis. "But I want to tell you one thing, daughter: I want you to join the church the very first time there is a confirmation; that is, if you are sure you know your own mind, and I guess you do. You are pretty apt to, I will say that for you."

"I think so," said Agnes. "I should like to be confirmed. It seems as if that and the communion,

and all, would be such a help and safeguard. I thought perhaps you would think I was too young to come forward."

"I don't," replied her mother. "Your grandfather Gleason was a minister of great experience, and I have heard him say that the proportion of backsliders among young church-members is much less than among those who wait till middle life. And it stands to reason, too, because they are not so fixed in bad habits."

"How did it happen, ma, that you never were confirmed yourself?" asked Agnes.

"Well, it was just that way. We had a large class confirmed when I was about your age. I was very serious at that time, and I wanted very much to come forward. Dr. Munson was in favor of it; and probably, if my parents had been alive, I should have done so. But I was living with Aunt Betsy then, and she was against it. She said I was too young to understand what I was about, and not serious-minded enough, and so on; and she wouldn't give her consent. Then I went away to Elmsbury, and there I fell in with a good deal of gay society; and— Well, I don't know how it was, but I lost my hope, and never found it again; and sometimes I think I never shall," added Mrs. Gleason sadly. "Aunt Betsy always says it shows she was right about me."

"I think it shows she was wrong," said Agnes.

"And so do I. I have got to answer for myself, of course, but I can't help blaming her for part of it; and I made up my mind that I should take a very different course with you."

"I am so glad!" said Agnes. "But, ma," she added timidly, "why don't you come forward now? It would be so sweet for us to go together. We always have been together in every thing, you know, ever since I was a little girl."

"Yes, I always have made a companion of you. Sometimes I'm afraid I put too much on you."

"No, you don't either," said Agnes, with some indignation. "There isn't a girl in Oldham has better times than I do, only for" —

"Only for the summer boarders," said Mrs. Gleason as Agnes paused. "Well, I hope we shall not have to take them again. I have calculated that this season will pay off the mortgage, and after that we shall be easy enough."

"But won't you think about it, ma?"

"Child, I have thought enough, if that would do any good. But, I don't know how it is, my heart seems as hard as the nether millstone, or like the Bald Rock on Indian Hill, where neither sun nor rain will make any thing grow."

"But we can *do* right, whether we *feel* right or not," said Agnes.

"There is something in that," replied her mother. "But we must not talk any more to-night. Go to bed, dear, and I will come as soon as I have set the bread. — Bless the child! I only wish her dear father knew it," added Mrs. Gleason to herself as she went about her bread. "I wish that Milly Richmond wasn't here: she is one of those birds of the air we read of in the parable. But I don't think my girl is a wayside hearer."

"I shall not dare to step out of doors all the time I am here," was Milly Richmond's comment on the snake story.

"You will get rather tired of that," said Mrs. Gleason. "I have known several 'snake summers' since I have been here, but I have seldom known of any one's being hurt. It was a narrow escape for little Eddy, however, and for Kit herself. I can't think how the child should know just what to do."

"She asked Sarah if she didn't think it was the Lord who showed her," said Agnes, "and Sarah said she didn't doubt it."

"Oh, I didn't know Sarah had taken up the pious dodge," remarked Milly, with a sneer. "Does the new teacher go in for that kind of thing?"

"What kind of thing?" asked Agnes. Then, as Milly only laughed, she added, "Miss Armstrong is a Christian woman, if that is what you mean; and we like her the better for it."

"Of course she is. Don't you know, Milly, we heard all about her from Miss Brown? She is a great friend of old Mrs. Van Zandt and that set," said Mrs. Richmond, who would have given one of her fingers for a call from aunt Barbara at her fine new house. "I wonder what brought her up here."

"Perhaps she came on a mission to convert the natives," said Milly, who never lost an opportunity of showing that she looked down on the people where she spent her summers. "Maybe she will convert you, Agnes."

"Maybe she has," said Agnes. "So much the better for me."

“Grandfather Gleason used to say that conversion is not the work of man, though man may be the honored instrument,” said Mrs. Gleason. “Agnes has got a great deal of good from Miss Armstrong already, and I hope she may get more. It is a pity you would not try going to school to her yourself, Milly. Perhaps she might do something, even for you.”

Milly curled her lip and tossed her head ; but she had come off second best in more than one encounter with her hostess, and she did not care to try another. She made up her mind, however, that, if Agnes had taken up any such notions, she would soon laugh her out of them. Mrs. Gleason had rightly called her one of the birds of the air. But such birds have no power over the seed sown in good ground ; it is only that which falls on the hard-trodden wayside which becomes their prey.

CHAPTER IX.

TWO TEA-PARTIES.

WHEN Mrs. Weston and Miss Armstrong entered Mrs. Bassett's front parlor, they found the rest of the company assembled, and were welcomed by their hostess with "Why, how late you are! I was most thinking you were not coming. I'm afraid you're growing fashionable, Abby."

"Not a bit," answered Mrs. Weston. "It was not fashion that kept me, but flour. Mr. Bassett was so late with the grist, that he made me late with my Saturday's baking; and I didn't like to leave it all to Selina."

"Do tell!" said Mrs. Bassett. "Pa has been very much driven with work, and Mr. Cook being sick puts him about. But where is Selina? I thought she would come too."

"I left her to keep house. She has to be elder daughter, now Lizzy is gone."

"Well, she must come another time. — Do take off your things, Miss Armstrong. I'm so glad to see you! I believe you know everybody here only Patience. Where is she? Oh, here she comes. —

Patience, let me make you acquainted with Miss Armstrong."

"I feel as if I knew Miss Fletcher already through the children," said Miss Armstrong, cordially shaking hands with Patience. "I hope Ednah is none the worse for her adventure this morning. Poor child, she had a terrible fright."

"Oh, yes, with the snake," said Mrs. Bassett. "The scare was enough to kill her."

"I don't think she was as much frightened as Faithie was," answered Patience. "She says herself she didn't have time. But it is dreadful to think what would have happened only for Kit," she added, shuddering. "I little thought, when I was fretting about that child's coming to school with our young ones, what she was to do for them."

"Which shows what I am always telling you, Patience, — that there is no use in fretting and borrowing trouble," remarked Mrs. Bassett.

"Kit seems a well-disposed child in every way, I think," said Miss Celia, whose knitting-needles were pursuing their rapid, even rounds in the corner. "She brought home my tortoise-shell kitten when it strayed away. I can hardly think she belongs to these people."

"She don't," returned Aunt Betsy, who had fulfilled Myra's prediction by 'dropping in' a little before tea-time. "If she was a Mallory, we should know something about her, at any rate. They took her out of the poorhouse. I don't suppose anybody even knows whether she had a grandfather."

"It seems probable that she had one of some

sort," said Mrs. Bassett. "Folks don't often come into the world like mushrooms, without any ancestors at all."

"She must have come of a good family somehow," said Miss Celia with mild persistence.

"I do not think that so certain," remarked Miss Armstrong. "I have had a good deal of experience with children in all positions, from what might be called the top of the social ladder to the bottom; and I have found all sorts of dispositions in all sorts of places. I have seen most beautiful growths of goodness and self-sacrifice in the midst of vice and ignorance such as you can have no idea of unless you have seen it, and I have seen very extraordinary tendencies to wickedness among children who had been most carefully brought up."

"Well, you won't persuade *me* that it don't make any difference whether folks are respectable, decent folks, or loafers," said Aunt Betsy. "Nobody will ever make me think *that*."

"Anybody would be very foolish to try," said Mrs. Weston. "All Miss Armstrong says is, that good and bad dispositions do not depend entirely upon family, or even upon training."

"Exactly so," assented Miss Armstrong. "Other things being equal, well-trained and well-nurtured children are likely to be better than those who are neither; but there are exceptions in all cases."

"To read some books, one would think that all people need is, to be shown the right way, and they jump into it at once," said Miss Delia. "I was reading one the other day, in which a young girl went

to stay at a country village for the summer, and converted everybody in it. Just as if all one had to do was to catch folks, and do good to them !”

“I know the class of books you mean, and I have a special objection to them,” said Miss Armstrong. “Old-fashioned people complain of novels because they give false views of life, and I find fault with these books for the same reason. Enthusiastic young people reading them are apt, as you say, to think that all one has to do to reform people is to set the good before them, and they take to it at once ; whereas the fact is, that sinners in general are not wicked because they know no better, but because they like wickedness the best.”

“Just so,” assented Mrs. Weston. “Look at the case of Harry Burchard, for instance,” alluding to a somewhat famous burglar. “That fellow had a good bringing-up, and learned a good trade ; and the same enterprise and ingenuity which made him such a successful burglar would have made him an equally successful business-man.”

“And it was no want of grandfathers in his case,” observed Miss Delia. “He is a great-grandson of old Mr. Wheeler, who used to preach in Oldbury in Revolutionary times. I’ve noticed in these same books, that, in all the church work, the pastor is of no account whatever : it is the young folks that do every thing.”

“Talking of pastors, is it true that Mr. Brace is coming in two weeks ?”

“Quite true, I am glad to say,” answered Mrs. Weston. “And that reminds me of something I want

to talk about." And Mrs. Weston forthwith plunged into the subject of the church-cleaning. All present took up the matter with enthusiasm, except Aunt Betsy, — who was constitutionally opposed to every thing, — and Patience Fletcher. Aunt Betsy thought it would never do to make such a fuss about cleaning up the church: it would be as much as saying right out that it was dirty; that would hurt Mr. Archimball's feelings, which would be a shame after all the years he had taken care of the church.

"All the years he hasn't taken care of it, you mean," said Mrs. Bassett. "If Archimball had done his duty, things wouldn't be in the state they are. I don't think we are bound to sit in the dirt all our lives, to spare his feelings. — Well, Patience, what do you think?"

"I think it is an excellent plan," answered Patience, "and I only wish I could promise to help about it; but I don't see how I can, I've got so much laid out to do next week."

"Poor thing!" said Mrs. Bassett, laughing. "It is a pity, Patience, that you hadn't a baker's dozen of children, so you could get a little leisure. What is it that presses so dreadfully? Maybe I can help you a little."

"Well, I calculated to clean the spare bedroom, for one thing; and there are the curtains to wash and do up, and the children's clothes to see to. Eben and Eddy do make so much washing!"

"Sakes alive! what would you do if you had my two big boys, besides Mr. Bassett and the little ones? Come, Patience, let the spare room rest a week. I

tell you it isn't good for any one to work all the time in a half-bushel. That's one reason why I am in favor of missionary work: it gives one an outlook, — makes a window into the world, as it were. — Don't you think so, Miss Armstrong?"

"I certainly do; but perhaps I am an interested party," answered Miss Armstrong, smiling. "I have been busy with missionary work of some sort ever since I was eighteen, and even before, for my father and mother were missionaries before me. But I think with you, Mrs. Bassett, that we all need outside windows in our lives. I believe many an over-worked housekeeper would find her life lightened if she would interest herself in something outside her own household."

"Yes, it is easy to say that," said Patience a little peevishly. "But there is only just so much time, anyhow; and, if it is full, it is full."

"Very true," replied Miss Armstrong. "In that case we must consider whether there is not something that can be turned out."

"A man is to provide first for his own household," said Patience.

"Very true again; but to provide what? that is the real question, you see. Is a man bound to spend so much time heaping dollar upon dollar for his sons, that he has no time to know what sort of companions they have, or where they pass their evenings? Or is a mother obliged to spend so much time and labor providing Sunday finery for her little daughter, that she has no time to teach the child her catechism, or see that she understands her Bible lesson?"

"That is an extreme case," said Patience.

"It is a very common case, I am sorry to say," answered Miss Armstrong. "I know more than one mother of moderate means who thinks she has no time to attend to her daughter's lessons, because she must dress the child as finely as somebody else who has five times her income."

"I don't think I put much finery on our children," said Patience; "but I do like to have them look nicely, — as their mother would like to have them look if she could see them."

"I think you do keep them very nicely," said Miss Armstrong. "It is easy to see that Eddy and Eben are not neglected for the sake of any thing. I never saw two better-trained or pleasanter children."

Patience's pale cheek flushed with pleasure. These two babies, left her by her fair young stepmother, herself a dear friend and playmate, were as the apple of her eye.

"Pa and Faithie deserve most of the credit of that," said she frankly. "Perhaps I do think too much about my housekeeping and all that. You see, I was left in charge when I was very young, and I felt such a responsibility. Even when mother Hester came, she was such a delicate little thing I felt I ought to spare her all I could; and she staid with us such a little time, — only a year and a half" —

"It was a dreadful foolish thing of your father, marrying that child, and when every one knew her family was consumptive," said Aunt Betsy.

"I don't think so," returned Patience. "It was one of the best things that ever happened in our

house. Hester was like a sunbeam, or like an angel that came to make a visit, and then went back to heaven again. Eddy is just like her."

"Yes, I expect she'll inherit the disease," rejoined Job's comforter. "She has just Hester's clear blue eyes and red cheeks."

"Nonsense!" said Mrs. Bassett. "Eddy is as tough as a little knot. That is another notion that does no end of harm,—I mean, thinking a girl must needs have the consumption because her mother had it. My grandfather was bitten in two by a sperm whale, but I don't expect that is going to happen to me."

"Whales don't run in families," said Aunt Betsy with dignity, while all the rest laughed: "consumption does."

"Whales have run in my family for a good many generations,—ever since Nantucket folks took to catching them," said Mrs. Bassett. "But, as to Ednah, I do hope nobody will put such an idea in the child's head. I do believe prophecies of that kind sometimes bring their own fulfilment."

"I think you are right, Mrs. Bassett," said Miss Armstrong. "I have known of at least one case in which melancholy insanity was brought on, apparently from no other cause than the one you mention."

"Talking of insanity brings us round to Kit again," said Mrs. Weston. "I do wish something could be done for that child. I spoke to Symantha about her coming to Sunday school; and she said she should have no objection herself, but there was no

use in talking to her father: he would never allow it, and would only be angry. I think she feared, though she did not say so, that he would visit his anger on the child."

"Yes, I know," added Mrs. Bassett. "He told pa he hated the very name of God. 'That's queer,' says pa, 'to hate somebody you don't believe in. I'd never trouble myself to hate a man if I believed there was no such person,' says pa. And Phin never said another word. Well, we must just bear poor Kit on our minds, and maybe some way will be opened. She seems to have a sense of religion, too, from all I hear. Myra says she asked Sarah Leet if she didn't think the Lord told her how to catch the snake."

"No doubt He did," said Miss Delia; "but it isn't every one that would have minded as quick as she did. Some folks would have said, 'Oh, dear! Lord, I can't: I'm afraid.'"

"Good-afternoon, ladies. Settling all the affairs of the parish, I expect," said Mr. Bassett, appearing at the parlor door in his dusty miller's coat, his hair and face white with flour. Mrs. Bassett looked scandalized.

"Now, pa, what do you mean coming in like that? Do go and dress yourself. There's your clean things all laid out for you, and you come in all over flour. I do declare, I never saw such a man! Go and get dressed, there's a dear, for I expect Myra has got tea all ready."

Mr. Bassett indulged in a jolly laugh as he withdrew, which was echoed from the great kitchen where

Myra and her little sisters were getting tea. Such laughs were common in the Bassett family. The household was one of those through which a fresh, warm gale seems always blowing, making a good deal of noise and stir, but keeping every thing bright and sweet.

"Did you ever see such a man?" said Ma Bassett, appealing to the company in general, with wifely and motherly pride shining all over her comely face. "And he makes the children as bad as he is. Such hands to laugh I never saw."

"The crackling of thorns under a pot, that's what Scripture calls it," said Aunt Betsy, who always resented a laugh as though it must needs be directed at herself.

"That is the laughter of fools," returned Miss Delia, bristling a little in defence of her host. "And I, for my part, would rather hear thorns crackling under a pot than the east wind screeching through a keyhole."

Aunt Betsy betook herself to her snuff-box, her usual refuge when worsted.

"Never mind, Delia; we all know Aunt Betsy's bark is worse than her bite," said Ma Bassett. "Ladies, will you walk out to supper?"

At the tea-table the subject of the church-cleaning was renewed. Mr. Bassett approved heartily.

"Such a piece of work ought to be easy here," remarked Miss Armstrong: "you all seem so united."

"Yes, we are very fortunate in that," answered Mr. Bassett. "There has never been any church here but ours. There is a small Methodist society

over at the cross-roads; very nice folks they are too, I must say."

"I don't see how you can say that," interrupted Aunt Betsy. "Joe Hilton belonged to them, and he got drunk at the county fair, and gambled away his cow."

"There are black sheep in every flock," said Miss Delia."

"And they took him back again, and he belongs there now," continued Aunt Betsy triumphantly, as though she considered the niceness of the Methodist folks forever disproved.

"Yes, they restored him in the spirit of meekness," said Mr. Bassett. "Poor Joe was a very hard case for many years before he joined the Methodists; and it was no wonder, perhaps, that the old temptation overcame him. He has worked for me all the spring, and I don't want a better man."

"Mr. Martin said the Methodist society was the natural refuge of the lower classes," observed Myra.

"Yes, I know he did; and that foolish remark repeated did more harm than he would ever do good. What business had he talking about upper and lower classes? His father was a foundryman, and his mother kept a little candy-shop to help them along."

"That was no disgrace to them," observed Miss Delia.

"Not a bit. It was an item to their credit, and ought to have kept him from talking such nonsense."

"What kind of a man was he?" asked Miss Armstrong.

"Well, he was a man of a good deal of talent and

reading ; but he did not get on, somehow," replied Mr. Bassett. "I don't know as I could tell what the matter was" —

"The matter was, that he was always feeling abused, and complaining, because, as he said, he had no congenial spirits to associate with," struck in Miss Delia. "He had a great notion of himself and his own consequence, and thought himself buried in a country parish ; and you see no church likes to be looked upon in the light of a tomb," added the little lady, laughing. "I hope Mr. Brace is not like that."

"He is not," said Miss Armstrong. "He is not a man to think himself buried anywhere, so long as he has work to do for his Master."

"Then you know him?"

"Oh, yes, I know him," answered Miss Armstrong: "we used to work together in New York years ago. I think you will all like him very much. He is very strong upon the proprieties of public worship," she added. "I could not help thinking of him last Sunday when I happened to notice that great cobweb in the corner over the organ."

"And that brings us to the church-cleaning again," said Ma Bassett, whose womanly eye saw that Miss Armstrong was a little bit agitated. The subject was discussed in all its length and breadth ; and, before the party broke up, it was quite settled that the two church-wardens should take the first step toward calling a parish meeting.

When the friends separated, Mrs. Weston and Miss Delia were deep in some occult mystery concerning the coloring of carpet-rags, an art for which

the little lady was renowned; and Miss Armstrong and Patience Fletcher walked on together.

"How easy Mrs. Bassett does take every thing!" said Patience. "I wish I was like her."

"Is she always so?" asked Miss Armstrong.

"Just the same, whatever happens. Even when her children were little, and they were not as well off as they are now, she never fretted. She always would take time to rest and read. I staid there once for three weeks when father had small-pox. Every day after dinner, when she had washed up the dishes and got the baby to sleep, she used to take her Bible or some other book, and lie down for half or three-quarters of an hour. Sometimes she would read, and sometimes she would take a little nap; but she always got up as fresh as a daisy."

"I suspect that is one secret of her cheerfulness," said Miss Armstrong. "She takes time to rest, and to feed her spirit."

"Well, I wonder if that is what ails me," said Patience.

"Does any thing ail you?" asked Miss Armstrong. "I thought you were a happy woman."

"Well, I am not," answered Patience. "I don't know what the matter is, either. It is all right enough outside, if I did not have quite so much to do; but, I don't know how it is, I don't have any peace or joy in religion. I pray, of course, and go to communion; but I don't have any comfort in it. My prayers never seem to get outside of the room."

"Since the Hearer of prayer is undoubtedly in the room, there is, perhaps, no need of their getting

out," said Miss Armstrong. "I understand the feeling, however, and it is a very sad one. But, Miss Fletcher" —

"Call me Patience, please. Everybody does."

"So I will, for it is a favorite name of mine. Are you sure, Patience, dear, that you are not starving your soul all this time? It must have nourishment, you know, as well as the body. Excuse the freedom of the question, but do you take time enough for your devotions?"

"I don't suppose I do," answered Patience. "I am so hurried in the morning, and at night I am so tired."

"But during the day, while the children are at school" —

"Yes, I know; but there always seems some sewing or cleaning to do, that takes up the time."

"Are you sure that all that sewing and cleaning are necessary? Or, if it is, why not leave some of it for Faith when she comes home? She ought to help you a good deal."

"Well, she does; and she would like to help me a great deal more. She isn't a bit of a shirk, Faith isn't. But — Well, the fact is, Miss Armstrong, I have my own ways and plans; and, if things are not done just exactly so, it puts me out, and makes me uncomfortable."

"Isn't it possible that you are making idols of your own ways and plans?" asked Miss Armstrong gently.

"Idols?" repeated Patience, as if a little offended. "I don't know what you mean."

"An idol is any thing which comes between us and God," said Miss Armstrong; "whatever we set up in His place is an idol. Your ways and plans may be ever so good; but, if you allow them to take all your time and thoughts" — Miss Armstrong paused, and added, "The cares of this world, you know, can choke the Word as well as the deceitfulness of riches."

"Yes, I know," said Patience; "but if He sends the cares?"

"The cares He sends don't often have that effect. It comes from the cares we make for ourselves. Let me tell you a little story to illustrate my meaning. I once attended a missionary meeting in a certain city, and staid with a very kind lady with whom I was slightly acquainted. The first meeting was in the afternoon, and I asked Mrs. M—— if she did not mean to go. She said it was impossible: she had been busy all the morning, and expected to be busy all the afternoon. I brought back with me another lady, who had been assigned to the same quarters. When we sat down to tea, we had four kinds of cake and two kinds of biscuit, besides a strawberry short-cake and some hot dish or other. We could not have eaten the four kinds of cake and the strawberry short-cake without risk to our lives; yet she must make them, though she lost the whole day's meeting. Now, were that lady's cares of the Lord's sending?"

"I suppose not," said Patience, laughing, as it seemed in spite of herself. "I don't think I am so bad as that, and yet I don't know. Perhaps I am. But, Miss Armstrong, I talked to Mr. Martin when

he was here, and told him how I felt, and how little interest I had in religion; and he said it was the state of my health, — that people always felt so when they were not well, and that he was the same way himself."

"I think that excuse is used far too often," replied Miss Armstrong. "It seems your health does not hinder your taking such an interest in your household matters that you can allow no one to help you; and, if so, why should it prevent you from being interested in your devotion?"

"There is something in that," observed Patience. "Mr. Martin himself was in a terrible taking because my Leghorn chickens were heavier than his. Besides that, it seems as if our religion can't be worth much if it is going to fail us when we want it the very most. Well, Miss Armstrong, I should not wonder if you were right. Anyhow, I will think it over."

"And pray over it," said Miss Armstrong. "And, dear Patience, remember that He who said, 'Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness,' was one who knew every one of our burdens and hinderances as well as ourselves, or better."

"If one could always remember that," said Patience rather sadly. "Well, good-night, Miss Armstrong. I am ever so much obliged to you." And Patience went home so full of thought that she actually failed to remark that Faith had hung up the dish-towels endways instead of lengthways, and had set up the teacups in twos instead of threes.

Another tea-party had been held that afternoon, quite as pleasant, though smaller and more informal.

"Kit," said Symantha after dinner, "don't you want to go up and play on the mountain this afternoon? I'm going to clean up the kitchen, and I want it all to myself."

"Yes, indeed, I should like it!" answered Kit; "but I thought perhaps you would want me to sit with aunt Martha."

"No; she had a bad time this morning, and she will be sure to sleep all the afternoon. I'll give you some gingerbread and a bottle of milk, so you can have a picnic and a nice time reading. Wait a minute: I've got something else for you." She left the room, and presently returned with a book bound in colored calf, old but still in good preservation. "That was my grandmother's book," said she as she put it into Kit's hands. "I found it this morning on the top shelf of a cupboard in the back room. Take good care of it."

Kit opened the volume, which proved to be a copy of the "Pilgrim's Progress" and "The Holy War" bound together.

"Oh, how glad I am!" she exclaimed. "Now I can read it all. Thank you, Symantha."

"I was looking for a Bible for you; and perhaps I shall find one yet, somewhere," said Symantha. "There ought to be one about the house, I should think."

"I have got a Testament," said Kit timidly.

"Have you? Where did you get it?"

Kit told the story. Symantha listened with her face turned away.

"Don't let pa or Melissa see it or know any thing

about it," was her comment. "Keep it hid away. After all, I don't see why he should care," she added, speaking more to herself than to Kit. "If it is all a dream, at least it is one that gives people comfort; and there is not too much of that in the world."

"But it isn't all a dream, I am sure it isn't," said Kit with tearful earnestness. "I don't know as I could tell you why, — I am only a little girl, — but I am just as sure it is true as that I am alive."

"Well, child, think so if it does you any good. I wish I did, though I am badly off if it is," Symantha added with a bitter smile. "But there, run along, and have a nice time. Pa and Melissa have gone to Oldbury, and won't be at home till night; so you can stay as long as you like."

Kit kissed Symantha, and betook herself to her favorite place on the hill. As she came round the end of the ledge, she saw two figures ascending from the other side, carrying a basket between them; and her heart beat with pleasure as she recognized the two young ladies from the stone house.

"Oh, I do hope they are coming here!" she said to herself. She was not mistaken.

"Here is our little hostess," said Ida. "I hoped we should find her. Kitty, my dear, will you lend us the use of your summer parlor this afternoon, and join us in a picnic? You see we have brought our basket."

Kit never knew exactly how she answered; but certain it is, neither of her guests found any fault with their welcome.

"Now, where shall we put our provisions, to keep

them fresh and cool till we want them?" asked Amity. For answer Kit moved away a thin slab of stone, and showed a deep, shady cavity, which seemed to be of some size.

"I call that my spring-house," said she. "There really is a spring in there. If you listen you will hear it."

Both the girls bent down, and distinctly heard the silvery splash of water-drops in the little cave.

"How very pretty!" said Amity. "If we lighted a match we might see the whole of it."

"I don't know as I want to," replied Kit a little shyly. "I like to think it is a great, deep cave with jewels and all kinds of beautiful things, and a lovely lady like the one in my old fairy-book."

"Exactly," said Ida. "I understand. You and I like to imagine, while Amity wants to go to the bottom of every thing with a match and a candle. However, we won't disturb your romance, Kitty. And now what shall we do to amuse ourselves? What book have you there?"

Kit displayed her treasure.

"What a nice old copy!" said Amity. "See, Ida, what a beautiful titlepage, with the warriors of 'The Holy War' winding down one side, and Christian and Hopeful toiling up the other. Suppose we take turns in reading aloud, Ida: I dare say Kitty will like to hear some of her book. And then you shall give us some music. — You will like that, won't you, Kitty?"

"Oh, yes, ma'am!" answered Kit with sparkling eyes; "but perhaps you and Miss Van Zandt would

rather read your own books," she added with instinctive politeness, glancing at the volumes the girls had taken from their basket.

"No, indeed!" answered Ida. "The 'Pilgrim's Progress' is just the book for such a place and such an afternoon."

"Well, don't let us waste all our time getting ready," said practical Amity, producing her knitting, which her friends were wont to consider as much a part of herself as her fingers. "Begin at the beginning, Ida."

"'As I walked through the wilderness of this world, I lighted on a certain place where was a den; and I laid me down in that place to sleep.'"

How many children during the last two hundred years have had their attention arrested, and their imaginations charmed, by these words! I know of no book which gains more by being well read aloud than the "Pilgrim's Progress;" and Ida read aloud uncommonly well, having been thoroughly trained in that most desirable accomplishment by her mother and aunt Barbara. I do not mean to imply that she was that fearsome creature, an elocutionist. On the contrary, she read like a lady, in a clear, soft voice, with due emphasis, and attention to stops. Kit sat with folded hands, and listened as in a happy dream. The weather was perfect, sunny but not too bright, with fleecy clouds passing over the blue sky, —

"Shepherded by the soft, unwilling wind," —

which did not reach the sheltered hillside. She felt a pleasure in the pretty calico dresses and well-suited

colors, the glossy hair and becoming hats, of the young ladies, in their well-trained voices and manners, and above all in the wonderful story. She did not, of course, understand it fully, — it is a book wherein the most experienced Christian may find much to ponder, — but she had a general idea of the meaning; while to her Christian and his wife, Obstinate and Pliable, Mr. Worldly Wiseman and the keeper of the wicket gate, were as real as uncle Phin and Mr. Bassett and all the other people she saw every day. Kit often looked back on that day as one of the happiest of her life.

“Now we will have some music,” said Amity after they had got Christian safely to the House Beautiful. “What will you sing, Ida?”

“What would Kitty like to hear?” asked Ida.

“Please, would you sing the hymn they sang in the schoolhouse the other night?” asked Kit with bashful eagerness. “The first one, I mean.”

Ida complied, and sang that most beautiful of hymns all through; Kit listening meanwhile as if her life depended on not losing a note.

“That is lovely!” she said, more to herself than to Ida, when the hymn was finished. “I think I could sing it now if I knew the words.”

“Can you sing?” asked Amity.

“Yes, ma’am, I could always sing every thing I heard; but I never had a chance to learn many hymns. I can sing ‘Swing low, sweet chariot,’ through.”

“Sing it,” said Amity; and Kit complied. Her voice, of course, was quite uncultivated.

“You ought to take singing-lessons,” remarked Ida. “I suppose you never had any.”

"No, ma'am. I never had lessons in any thing till I came here, only Symantha taught me to read and write, and to sew; and sometimes I would go to school a few weeks at a time, but not very often."

"You don't remember any thing about your mother?"

"No, ma'am, not really. Sometimes when aunt Martha is pretty quiet, and especially when I look at her asleep, she makes me think about my mother; but I can't tell why. Melissa says my mother died in the poorhouse; but she is such a liar I never believe any thing *she* says," concluded Kit in a matter-of-fact tone which scandalized Amity.

"Hush, hush!" said she. "Little girls should not call people liars."

"Not when they tell lies?" asked Kit. "Melissa does; you *can't* believe a word she says about any thing."

Ida bent down to hide a smile, and Amity found it convenient to change the subject.

"Does not Symantha tell you any thing about your mother?"

"No, ma'am. I asked her once or twice, but she did not answer; and I saw she did not like it, so I didn't say any more. Symantha has so much trouble, and she is so good to me, I don't like to do any thing to bother her."

"Quite right," said Amity. "But you say you do not think you lived in the poorhouse. Why?"

Kit knitted her brows, and her eyes assumed the far-off look they always took when she tried to recall her faint recollections of her former home.

"Because of things I can recollect," said she. "I remember sitting on the floor, and tracing out the pattern of the carpet with my finger. When I saw Mrs. Blandy's carpet hung out, I thought of it. And I remember a gray bird in a round cage, and—I know that can't be true though—it seems just as if it could talk."

"I dare say it did," said Ida. "Probably the bird was a gray parrot. But don't you recollect any lady that took care of you, and that you called mamma or mother?"

"No, not really," said Kit. "Whenever I try, it seems for a minute as if I did; and then she gets all mixed up with aunt Martha. Only there is one thing I have thought of since you said that name Kathleen," added Kit eagerly. "I know that is my name; and somebody, I don't know who, used to sing a song about Kathleen,— 'Kathleen My —' something. I think I should know the tune if I heard it: I always do remember tunes."

"Was this it?" asked Ida, and she sang a verse of the beautiful Irish song,—

"Kathleen Mavourneen, the gray dawn is breaking."

She had not finished the verse when Kit broke in, her eyes and cheeks blazing with excitement,—

"That is it, that is it! I have dreamed it sometimes, but I never could remember it when I was awake. Oh, I know it was my mother that sang that!" and she burst into such a passionate fit of crying and sobbing, that the girls were alarmed.

"Hush, my dear. Don't cry so; you will be sick,"

said Amity, putting her arm round the child. "There, try to quiet yourself."

Kit made a violent effort, and succeeded in regaining some degree of composure. "I can't think what makes me cry so easy," she said as she wiped her eyes. "I cried about the snake this morning. I think it must be because my hand keeps me awake nights."

"Perhaps so. Is your hand so bad?"

"Yes, ma'am ; it is very sore."

"What was it about the snake?" asked Ida, looking nervously about her. She was dreadfully afraid of snakes, and was always suspecting them in every possible locality.

"Oh, there are none here," said Kit, seeing Ida's movement. "I never saw a snake on this hill. It was down at the schoolhouse. I think it did scare me, for I have felt shaky ever since."

"But what was it?" persisted Ida. Kit told the story in as few words as possible.

"You dear, brave little thing!" exclaimed Ida. "How could you do it? It makes me shudder to think of it."

"Well, it wasn't *nice*," said Kit emphatically: "it felt so cold and horrid! I felt as if I wanted to wash my hands a dozen times over."

"I don't wonder. But don't let us talk about it any more now," said Amity. "I think we had better have our tea. I don't know how you two feel, but I am hungry."

"I have got some gingerbread and milk, if you like it," said Kit modestly. "Symantha makes real nice gingerbread."

"That will be a fine addition to our feast. Come, Ida, let us set the table; and Kit shall be the company, and look on."

Never was any thing so pretty, Kit thought, as the little china plates and cups produced from the basket; never any thing so wonderful as the spirit-lamp over which Amity heated up the tea, or so nice as the sandwiches and sponge-cake. When all was ready, Ida made a sign to Amity, who bent her head and said a simple grace. Kit looked on with awe. It was the first time she had ever seen or heard of such a thing. The girls ate their supper with abundance of jokes and laughter. Kit had not much appetite, but she enjoyed the delicate sandwich, and the fragrant cup of tea which helped the headache she had carried all day.

"Well, we have had a very nice time," said Amity after she had repacked the basket. "Now, Kitty, what can we do for you?"

"You have done too much for me now," replied Kit. "I never had such a nice time in my life. Only"—

"Only what?" asked Ida.

"I wish I had the words of that hymn," said Kit, blushing. "I think I could sing it sometimes if I knew the words. And that about the shadow of the wing is so nice: it makes me think of the little chickens running under the old hen when it rains, or they are scared."

"That is what it means," said Ida. "Let me tell you a verse in the Bible about that: 'He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt

thou trust' (Ps. xci. 4). You shall have the hymn, Kathleen. I will send you a little book which has it and a good many more. I will give it to Miss Armstrong to-morrow. Good-night, my dear. I hope we shall have another nice picnic some time."

When Amity and Ida reached home, they told Mrs. Van Zandt what Kit had said, and how she remembered the song.

"I do believe she is Kathleen Joyce's child," said aunt Barbara. "But how should she come into these people's hands, and why should they wish to keep her away from every one?"

"I was struck with one thing she said," remarked Ida, — "that, when she thought of her mother, she always got her mixed up with aunt Martha. Do you suppose it possible that she can be Mrs. Mallory's child?"

"It does not seem likely," said Mrs. Van Zandt. "Why should they wish to conceal it?"

"There might be some money in the case," said Ida.

"It is possible. I heard that Kathleen's husband became quite wealthy at one time, from some fortunate speculation."

"Did she never write to you after her marriage?" asked Amity.

"Never," answered Mrs. Van Zandt sadly.

"Perhaps her husband would not allow it."

"I think that very likely; he never forgave my opposition to the match. And some notion of loyalty to his memory might have kept her from writing afterward."

"It seems loyalty to his memory did not prevent her marrying again," said Amity.

"That is different, as the children say," replied Mrs. Van Zandt; "and, besides, we do not know that it is the same person."

"Some people would consider poor Kathleen's conduct as an argument against the adoption of children," said Amity.

Mrs. Van Zandt smiled rather sadly.

"I have heard of other than adopted daughters making runaway matches," said she. "Moreover, on looking back, I can see where I was myself to blame in Kathleen's case. I indulged and petted her beyond all reason. I allowed her to please herself in all things, and never taught her to exercise self-denial or self-control. Spoiled children are not often grateful to their spoilers; and, indeed, I do not know why they should be. Well, my dears, we must keep our eyes on this poor little girl, and try to befriend her. Whoever she may be, she is one of the Lord's little ones. Perhaps the truth may come out some time. I am glad that you have given her at least one pleasant afternoon."

CHAPTER X.

THE BIRDS OF THE AIR.

KIT had hardly reached home when she saw her uncle drive into the yard, and presently he entered the kitchen with Melissa. Phin's brow was dark, and he had an uneasy expression, as though (so Kit said to herself) he had been doing something he was ashamed of. Melissa, on the contrary, was in excellent spirits, and wore a decided expression of triumph. There was something in the way she looked at Kit which made the child feel uncomfortable, she did not know why. Phin hardly spoke, except to inquire for his wife, till after supper. Then he turned to Kit, and asked, not unkindly, —

“Well, Kit, how is your hand?”

“It is very sore,” said Kit: “I can't use it a bit, and it ached all night almost.”

“What is it about the snake?” asked Melissa. “We stopped at the tavern, and some one told pa a great story about your saving Fletcher's girl from a snake.”

“It wasn't any great story,” answered Kit composedly. “A copperhead snake twisted round Eddy's leg, and I pulled it off and killed it.”

"Yes, that's a likely yarn," said Melissa contemptuously. "How did you pull it off, I should like to know? and how did you know it was a copper-head?"

"I took it with my thumb and finger right behind its head, and then stamped on it," answered Kit. "And Mr. Bassett said it was a copperhead; but I knew it just as soon as I saw it."

"I don't believe a word of it," said Melissa.

"And I don't care whether you believe it or not," retorted Kit. Somehow Melissa always aroused all that was unamiable in the child's disposition. Melissa delighted in teasing her, and found great amusement in the fits of passion she sometimes provoked.

"Well, well, you were a brave child; but you had no business to run such a risk," was Phin's comment. "Suppose the snake had bitten you?"

"Then I should have died, I suppose," replied Kit simply.

"We don't want you to die just yet," said Phin with some show of feeling. "You must hurry and get your hand well."

"Why?" asked Kit, struck with something unusual in the tone.

"Oh, because. Maybe I shall want you to do something for me," answered Phin with assumed carelessness.

"What is the use of mincing matters, pa?" asked Melissa. "The long and the short of it is, that we have got a place in Oldbury for Kit; and she is going to it as soon as her hand gets well, so there!" and Melissa threw herself back in her chair with a

glance which spoke of satisfied and malicious triumph.

"There will be two words to that," said Symantha dryly. "What sort of a place?"

"A place to wash dishes and wait on table at Stillwell's confectionery and dining hall," answered Melissa. "They will give her a dollar and a half a week, and perhaps more if she earns it."

"Oh!" said Symantha in the same dry tone. "And what are they going to give me?"

"You?" said her father. "What do you mean?"

"Kit, run out and let in the cows," said Symantha. "I mean what I say, father," she continued firmly as Kit left the room. "That child is not going to any such place as Stillwell's, or to any place at present; or, if she does, I go with her."

"You do? And who is to take care of Martha and the work?"

"I'm sure I won't," said Melissa.

"That is your affair," answered Symantha. "All I know is, that, if Kit goes to work in Oldbury, I go too."

"What nonsense!" said Phin peevishly. "What is the child to you? Besides, Melissa is going to work in the same place; and she can see to the child if she needs any seeing to."

"Melissa will have enough to look after herself if she goes to that rum-hole," returned Symantha. "I should think, if she wants a place, she might at least take a decent one."

"I am not going into any one's kitchen when I can get four dollars a week and lots of presents by

standing behind a counter," said Melissa. "However, you can settle it between you," she added, rising from the table. "I am going over to Mariette Jewsbury's. I have been doing some shopping for her."

"I think you might stay and help do up the work," said her father. But Melissa only laughed as she slammed the door behind her.

"See here, father," said Symantha gravely. "I want to talk about this matter sensibly. You promised me, when I gave up every thing—as you know I did—to stay with you, and take charge of ma, that I should always have my own way about Kit. Haven't I kept my part of the bargain?"

"I don't deny that you have," answered Phin, "but a man can't always keep his promises."

"You must keep yours in this case, or I shall not keep mine," said Symantha. "Just as surely as Kit goes to Oldbury, I shall go too. You know best how you would get on without me."

"You are a fool," said her father roughly, but evidently moved. "I tell you we ought to get her away from here. She grows more like her mother every day. This old lady, Mrs. Van Zandt, is sure to see her; and then there will be an inquiry, and all will come out, about the property and all."

"Well, let it come. It was foolish to make a secret of it in the first place. You are not accountable for the property."

"That is all you know about it. I tell you the child must go."

"Then I must go, too, that's all," was the calm

rejoinder. "And there is another thing: I can't spare Kit. She can manage ma better than anybody, and sometimes when I can't do any thing with her; and it is every thing to keep her quiet."

"That is true; and, if Melissa goes away, you will need her help about the work," said Phin, evidently wavering in his purpose more and more as he saw the steadfastness of his daughter. "Perhaps you had better keep her out of school."

"I don't want to do that. She is getting on nicely, and making good friends."

"Yes, that is one trouble. She makes too many friends."

"It won't be a trouble if you don't make a fuss about it. Please listen to me, father. I have been a dutiful daughter to you, haven't I? I don't set up for goodness, but you know whether I have been that."

"Yes, my girl, you have," said her father with feeling. "I don't deny it. You have stuck to me through thick and thin, as very few girls would have done."

"Then, if I have, give me my way in this," pleaded Symantha. "Let me keep Kit. If I can find the right kind of place for her, I will let her go by and by; but let me keep her now. Don't send her straight to ruin. Melissa is a woman, and must go her own way; but don't send the innocent child into such a place as Stillwell's." And, to her father's amazement and alarm, Symantha burst into tears. He had never seen her cry before, since she was a child.

"There, there, my girl, have your own way, and

don't cry," said he. "I didn't think you cared so much about it. Her arm is too sore to do any thing now, and I can make that an excuse to Stillwell. There, do stop crying. I won't say any thing more about it just now, at any rate."

"Thank you, father," said Symantha, trying to check her sobs.

Phin's lip twitched. "It is little you have to thank me for," he said in a husky voice. "I've thrown away your life as well as my own."

"You needn't throw it away, — any more of it, I mean," said Symantha. "Now we have got this place, why can't you settle down and be steady? The farm isn't a bad one for dairy-work, and the cows are good and growing better. I'll do my share if I work my fingers off."

"Yes, I dare say you would; but — Well, there is no use talking," said Phin gloomily. "There is no such thing as a man's breaking away from his past life. It will come after him. But never mind that. You shall have your way about Kit. Poor girl, you don't have much comfort of your life, anyhow."

A few minutes afterward, Phin had occasion to go to the barn-loft. There was a small, roughly finished room in one end, which was a favorite playing-place of Kit's in bad weather. Phin thought he heard a voice, and peeped through a knot-hole. What did he see and hear? He saw a young child on her knees, almost on her face, in an agony of prayer, and heard over and over again, —

"Oh, don't, don't let me go to that dreadful place, away from Symantha and Miss Armstrong and all!

Please do make uncle Phin let me stay here, and do make him be a good man and believe in the Bible; and please forgive him for burning me, for I don't think he meant to do it."

When Phin reached the lower floor, he stamped his foot, and muttered as if in anger; but his anger was not directed against Kit. When Melissa, in the course of the evening, said something about the place at Stillwell's, she was promptly silenced.

"Kit can't go now: her arm is too bad. And I don't know that I shall let her go at all. We can't spare the only saint in the family; eh, Kit? Come here."

Kit came trembling, for she never knew what to expect.

"So you don't want to go and earn wages, and have all the candy you can eat? You would rather stay with Symantha?"

"Yes, I would," replied Kit, taking courage. "I don't care about candy, and I don't want to go away. Please, uncle Phin, don't send me."

"Well, I won't, then; not just now, at any rate. I thought perhaps you would like a change. Is your arm so sore?" he asked, as Kit winced on his touching it. "Let me see."

He undid the arm tenderly enough. It was red and angry, and had the peculiar odor of a bad burn. Phin looked grave over it.

"If this is not better by Monday, we must take you to the doctor," said he, carefully replacing the bandage. "You don't think I did it on purpose, do you, if I did burn the book?"

"No," answered Kit. "Anyhow, I cared more about the book than I did about my arm."

"I'll get you a prettier book than that some day. There, give me a kiss, and go to bed."

"Oh, very well," said Melissa in an affected tone of carelessness, which nevertheless trembled with anger. "I'm sure I don't care. If pa thinks he can afford to quarrel with Stillwell, it is nothing to me."

Phin made no reply, and the matter was dropped.

Sunday morning rose warm and beautiful, with that indescribable atmosphere of tranquil repose which belongs to Sunday in the country, and especially in New England. By ten o'clock, however, the roads were alive with teams of all sorts, from Mrs. Van Zandt's phaeton and Mr. Weston's roomy family carriage, to old Miss Jewsbury's venerable "one-horse shay," and Mr. Bassett's long wagon, with its straight-backed, splint-bottomed wagon chairs, with its crickets and cushions put in here and there for the accommodation of the smaller fry, for Mrs. Bassett always took her children to church by the time they were three years old. Manifold were the greetings and hand-shakings as groups of friends and relations alighted at the horse-block by the door of the old church on the green; and many and kind the inquiries for this or that one detained at home by illness in their families.

"No, Celia isn't out this morning," said Miss Delia. "She had one of her bad headaches last night, and they always leave her kind of prostrated for two or three days. Who is going to preach?"

"I am not sure we shall have any one," answered

Mr. Weston, to whom the question was addressed. "Mr. Martin sent word the last minute that he could not come" —

"Just like him," interposed Miss Delia.

"Oh, come, you mustn't be hard on him. Perhaps he couldn't help it," said Mr. Weston. "Dr. Chase drove over to Oldbury last night to see if he could find any one, but whether he succeeded or not I don't know; however, we shall soon find out."

"Well, I shall be glad when we have a settled minister again. — How is your mother, Agnes? I see she isn't out."

"No: Mrs. Richmond and Milly wanted to come, so ma staid at home with Cordelia. I am going home after Sunday school, so she can come this afternoon."

"How do you do, Mrs. Richmond?" said Miss Delia as that lady sailed up the steps attired in a silk which had once been rich and handsome, but was now decidedly the worse for wear. Mrs. Richmond had a way of wearing out her old finery in the country. She seldom went to church in Oldham, or, indeed, anywhere else; but she had a desire to get, as she said, a good look at Mrs. Van Zandt. She acknowledged Miss Delia's greeting with great condescension; while her daughter did not notice it at all, but hastened on to speak to Selina Weston.

"Well, Selina, how have you been? I've been looking out for you all the way. I *have* wanted to see you so! You don't *know* how often I have thought of you."

"Yes, you must have thought of me very often,"

answered Selina coolly, "you wrote to me so many times."

"Oh, my dear, you don't think how many engagements I have in town. And besides, I don't know how it is, I haven't any taste for writing letters: I can't express what I feel, and writing seems so cold and heartless. But I have thought of you, whether you believe it or not. I should have come over to your house yesterday, only we were so busy getting settled, and poor Cordelia was so tired with the journey."

Amelia Richmond was one of those people whose very voices are suggestive of flattery; a *palaverer*, Miss Delia called her, but Miss Delia was a little apt to be severe.

"Do you sing in the choir now?" asked Amelia. Then, as Selina nodded, "I mean to sit up there this morning, and then we can get together in sermon time. Oh, you needn't look so shocked. I don't mean to talk, of course, but just for the pleasure of sitting by you."

"Come, then," said Selina; "it is time we were in our places."

"Wait just a minute. I want to see the Van Zandts come in. Well, they don't mean to hurt themselves dressing; but I suppose any thing is good enough for the country, as ma says. Anyhow, if I was heiress to half a million, like Miss Bogardus, I would wear something better than satteen."

"Her dress is elegantly made, though," said Selina, feeling all the time that she ought not to be discussing such matters in church. "See that other

young lady. Doesn't she look like a cloud in all that soft cream-color?"

"You goose! it is only nun's veiling, and did not cost a cent over fifty cents a yard," said Amelia, who estimated every thing by the price. "Well, they are no great sight, after all. Here comes the preacher, I suppose. Who is he? Some stupid old country parson, I dare say."

"Do be quiet," whispered Selina: "everybody will hear you. Come, we must go up stairs."

"On second thoughts, I believe I will sit with ma," said Milly. "I want to get a nearer look at Miss Van Zandt's dress."

Selina was not sorry. She had been brought up to behave properly in church; and, greatly under Milly's influence as she was, she could not bring herself to believe that whispering and laughing in the sanctuary of God were any marks of high breeding. Selina had come to church more than usually disposed to serious thought. She could not, perhaps, have given any reason for her state of mind that day; but she felt almost ready to say, once for all, that she would take a decided stand, and enlist openly under the banner of her rightful King. She took her seat quietly, arranged her books, and then opened her Bible to look over her lesson.

Oldham church was a simple, pretty building, quite plain, but comfortable, and perfectly adapted to the purpose for which it was used, if it had been kept in order. But the green blinds were faded, and rusty with the dust of many summers. The high white-glass windows cast a light which, though dim, was

by no means "religious," as the poet has it; being darkened, not from being "richly dight," but by successive deposits of dirt and cobwebs. Dust and flue lay in corners, yes, even of the chancel itself. The chimneys of the kerosene lamps were dark with smoke and fly-specks, and the lamps themselves looked as if the wicks had not been changed since kerosene was invented. Of all the notable housewives who came thither to worship Sunday after Sunday, not one, probably, would have allowed such a state of things, even in her garret; yet they saw it in the house of God without even a thought of incongruity. Now and then somebody would make a remark about the dust or the smoke, but that was all. It was Mr. Archimball's business. He was a most respectable man and a church-member, and nobody liked to hurt his feelings by suggesting to him that his business was not attended to.

But somehow that clean-swept, well-aired school-house had waked people up wonderfully. Mr. Bassett sniffed the air as he entered, and said to himself that it was "stuffy;" and his wife saw the dust in the corner by the stove as she had never seen it before. Patience Fletcher looked at the windows, and thought she should really enjoy washing them; and Mrs. Weston had to make an effort to withdraw her mind from a calculation relative to the number of yards of new carpet which would be required for the chancel and aisles. It is to be feared that more than one feminine mind was a little distraught during the service.

But dust and cobwebs and carpet were all forgot-

ten when the preacher began his sermon. He was an old gentleman, very plain and quiet in appearance; and his voice, as he gave out the text, was somewhat low and tremulous: "Come up hither, and I will show thee things which must be hereafter" (Rev. iv. 1). He had not spoken five minutes when the attention of the whole congregation was fixed as one man. It was not the brilliancy of his style, which was simple with the simplicity of much reading and study: it was his intense earnestness, and his evident deep conviction of the awful truths which he set forth. The discourse was upon the "last things,"—death and judgment, hell and heaven. Even poor, frivolous Mrs. Blandy forgot to study the dress of the strangers in church, and almost resolved that she would think more of these matters. To many of the congregation, the words were as the bread of life. To say truth, Oldham had not of late been greatly favored in the matter of preaching. Mr. Martin, the late rector, had prided himself on being liberal and broad in his views. A clergyman, he thought, should keep up with the interest of the day; so he talked much of science and criticism, and gave his hearers hashes of certain monthly magazines, slightly warmed and mildly seasoned with Scripture quotations, or preached mild little moral essays, adapted, as he was wont to say, to that class of minds which make up most country congregations. In truth, Mr. Martin felt himself thrown away in Oldham; and he did not make things any more pleasant for himself by saying so, and by his continual complaints of the hardships of his position. He had at last given up that posi-

tion for the place of assistant in a large city church ; but the large city church had not found Mr. Martin any more congenial than he had found the people of Oldham, and he was at present living at home with his mother.

But this present preacher spoke of things which every one wished to hear. Agnes Gleason drank in every word, only wishing that her mother was there. Selina listened intently, forgetting for the time to wonder whether some one did not think Myra Bassett's voice better than hers. She had naturally a fine taste, and she had read good books. She appreciated the finished elegance of the discourse, but that was not all. As the preacher, with the solemnity of deep conviction, set forth "the things that must be hereafter," Selina felt that these were indeed the real things which make life worth living ; which give to worldly things all the significance which they possess ; which must have a being after all the triumphs and treasures, the battles and victories, of this world, are but forgotten dreams. She made up her mind that she would no longer live as she had done ; she would strive to live as a Christian should, to fulfil the vows of her baptism : and then — here the little mean bosom snake of envy reared its head — then father and mother would think as much of her as they did of Lizzy. Selina was not to blame for the voice of the tempter any further than that she had given him encouragement before. She might have silenced him by refusing to listen to him, but she did not. She began thinking how much more devoted she would be than Lizzy had

ever been, how she would teach others, how she would influence Milly Richmond, and make her a Christian, and, perhaps, go on a mission, as Miss Armstrong had done.

"But I won't come home the first minute I get sick. No, indeed! I will die on the field of battle," she said to herself. And then she recollected herself with a blush, and found she had lost the thread of the discourse.

"I won't be so silly again," she said to herself. "I believe I *am* always thinking about myself, as father says." She managed to elude Milly when she came down, and went straight into Sunday school.

"Wasn't that a noble sermon?" whispered Faith as Agnes and Selina came into the class. "Don't you wish we could have him all the time?"

"Yes, indeed. Who is he?"

"Dr. — Somebody from New York, I did not catch the name. See, Mrs. Van Zandt is speaking to him."

"I wonder what we shall do for a teacher," said Agnes. "I am so sorry Miss Celia isn't here. I wanted to see her particularly."

"Perhaps Miss Armstrong will teach us," observed Faith.

"No, she won't. The doctor has forbidden her teaching in Sunday school this summer," replied Selina. "See there, girls; father is speaking to Mrs. Van Zandt. I wonder if he is asking her to hear us. I wish she would. She is so sweet-looking."

"You will have your desire, then," said Agnes, "for here she comes."

"O mother, how I wish you had been in church!" said Agnes after Sunday school, coming into the room where Mrs. Gleason was pouring out an after-dinner cup of tea for her boarders. "We did have such a noble sermon!"

"Is that so?" asked Mrs. Gleason. "Mrs. Richmond did not like it."

"You see, it is not the kind of preaching I am used to," said Mrs. Richmond in a tone which always seemed to say, "See how superior I am." "In the city one hears such a different style. You should hear Dr. Madison,—that is an intellectual feast, though I admit that he is rather old-fashioned. And such a congregation as he has! You can't hire any kind of a pew for less than five hundred dollars."

"It was Dr. Madison who preached this morning," said Agnes quietly, but with a gleam of mischief in her eyes.

"Nonsense!" said Milly. "A likely story, indeed, that Dr. Madison would be preaching in a place like this!"

"It could not be *our* Dr. Madison," added Mrs. Richmond. "Very likely that might be his name, however: it is not an uncommon one."

"All I know is," said Agnes, "that Mrs. Van Zandt taught our class. Dr. Madison came into Sunday school, and Mrs. Van Zandt introduced him to us. He said a few words on the lesson. Afterward I asked Mrs. Van Zandt where he preached, and she said in St. Timothy's Church in New York. She goes there, so she ought to know."

"Dear me!" said Mrs. Richmond, "I am so very

short-sighted, and I am sure the dear doctor did not do himself justice this morning. But he is growing old, poor dear man."

"Well, I never wish to hear a better sermon than he gave us this morning," said Agnes.

"You are a judge, no doubt," sneered Milly; "you have had so many opportunities of forming a taste."

"It is not a matter of taste exactly," said Agnes, getting hold of her temper, which was in some danger of escaping from her control. "Dr. Madison's sermon was just what I wanted to hear. It went straight to the right spot, as poor Aunt Betsy says about her coffee. And what he said in Sunday school was so nice. He did not talk baby-talk, as some do, or tell funny stories, but spoke as if the children were rational beings. You must go this afternoon, mother. Do get ready. I will do up the work."

"I believe I will go too," said Milly. "I want to see whether it was really Dr. Madison."

"I thought you would stay with Cordelia," remarked Mrs. Richmond. "I want to lie down a while. My head aches very badly."

"Oh, she won't want any thing," replied Milly carelessly. "You can just as well lie down in her room." And, without saying more, she went away to get ready for church. Her mother looked after her with a sigh. She often had occasion to deplore Milly's selfishness, but it never occurred to her to think that it was the direct result of her own training.

"I will stay with Cordelia, Mrs. Richmond," said

Agnes. "I will put the dishes to soak, and wash them after supper; and you can lie down in my room, and have a good sleep. I am sure you need it."

This was something of a sacrifice for Agnes. She had been looking forward to a quiet afternoon with her Bible. She was fond of Cordelia, and sorry for her; but the poor, feeble child was often fretful and hard to please, and Agnes sometimes thought she invented wants to keep her attendants from sitting still. But Agnes had a new principle of action within, which made her apply to herself the Golden Text she had recited that very morning, — "For even Christ pleased not Himself."

"Thank you, my dear; you are really very kind," said Mrs. Richmond. Hard, worldly woman as she was, nothing touched her so quickly as kindness shown to her sick child. "But I don't like to deprive you of the pleasure of hearing your favorite preacher."

"Oh, I shall hear him again some time," answered Agnes: "he is going to stay at Oldfield all summer. And, besides, I did not mean to go to church this afternoon, at any rate. My room is shady and cool, and I hope you will have a nice nap. Don't you think I might draw Cordelia out on the veranda? It is sheltered on that side of the house, and the air is lovely."

"I should be very glad if you can persuade her to go out," said Mrs. Richmond. "The doctor says she must have as much fresh air as possible, but it is hard to get her to move."

"You will have your hands full," said Mrs. Glea-

son as Agnes helped her to put on her shawl. "The poor child is worse than I ever saw her."

"Cross?" asked Agnes.

"No, not exactly, but nervous and full of fancies. It seems she did not want to come away from home. She says she knows she shall never be well, and it is just tormenting her for nothing."

"I believe she is right there," said Agnes. "She has failed a great deal this winter. I wonder her mother doesn't see it."

"Folks can't see what they won't see," was Mrs. Gleason's remark. "Perhaps Cordelia may go to sleep, and then you can have a nice time reading."

But Cordelia had no mind to go to sleep. She had always been a delicate child, and was now fading away in one of those mysterious "declines" for which no reason can be given; suffering much at times from neuralgia, and always from that nervous weakness which is still harder to bear.

"Where is mother?" was her first question.

"She has a bad headache, and has gone to lie down. You can stand it with me a little while, can't you?" asked Agnes cheerfully.

"Why don't you go to church?" was the next sharp inquiry.

"Because I staid at home to let mother go, and to take care of you."

"I am sure that was very good of you," was the somewhat unexpected answer. "I don't think I am very entertaining company."

"We don't expect sick people to be entertaining," said Agnes. "But, Cordelia, I wish you would let

me put you in your chair, and take you out of doors. You don't know how lovely it is."

Cordelia objected at first, but suffered herself to be persuaded. Agnes wrapped her up carefully, and, putting her into her wheeled chair, drew her out upon the broad old-fashioned "stoop" before the front-door, which commanded a lovely view of field and mountain.

"Isn't this nice?" said she as she settled her charge in the pleasantest, shadiest corner, and arranged her wraps, for Agnes was a born nurse. "Look, you can see the people going into church."

"I wish I could go," said Cordelia with a deep sigh. "But I shall never go anywhere again: I know that very well, for all they say about my getting better." Agnes did not answer, except by a kiss upon the pale forehead. She knew how to be silent when there was nothing to say. She brought her Bible, and sat down on the step by Cordelia; and the two were quiet for some time.

"Who is that very dark, very old-looking man walking up the street?" asked Cordelia at last. "There, he is just going up the church steps."

"That is old Abner Kettle," answered Agnes. "He is the last full-blooded Indian left anywhere about here. He is a hundred at the very least. We know that, because he remembers the Revolution quite well. He has a very nice little place of his own over on Indian Hill, and works in his garden as well as any one, besides walking to church every Sunday. We must ask him up here some day. You would like to hear him talk."

"And I am only fifteen, fifteen my next birthday, and I shall never walk again anywhere," said Cordelia in a tone of deep sadness. "But there, I won't bother you. Read your book in peace. What is it?"

"The Bible," answered Agnes. "I was going to look over my Sunday-school lesson, but I can do it another time if you would rather talk."

"I don't mind," said Cordelia. She was silent a while, and then spoke again, —

"Agnes, isn't there a chapter in the New Testament somewhere about 'many mansions,' or some such thing as that?"¹

"Yes: in the fourteenth chapter of St. John's Gospel. Shall I read it to you?"

"Yes, please."

Agnes read the chapter. She had a pleasant voice, and read well and reverently. It seemed to her as if the wonderful words had never seemed half so wonderful before.

"Thank you," said Cordelia when she had finished. She was silent a little, and then said, with a kind of abruptness, —

"Agnes, how should you feel if you knew you were dying, as I am?"

"I don't know," answered Agnes. "I never was dangerously ill a day in my life. But what makes you think you are dying, Cordelia? The doctors do not say so, and your mother thinks you are better."

"What do *you* think?" asked Cordelia with a kind

¹ This may seem improbable, but I have met with worse cases. An elderly lady asked me if "Do as you would be done by," or *something like it*, was not in the Bible. This same lady, by the way, could talk quite glibly about "the latest results of German criticism."

of fierceness. Then, as Agnes did not reply, she said more gently, —

“Do tell me just what you think. I can’t say a word to mother, because she cries so; and Milly only laughs, and says, ‘Oh, you are notional.’ Do tell me.”

“I think you are not as well as you were last summer,” answered Agnes.

“But now, suppose I were your sister,” persisted Cordelia, “would you have any hopes of me?”

“No,” answered Agnes, “I don’t think I should.”

“Thank you,” said Cordelia. She was silent a little, and then asked, —

“Agnes, would you be afraid to die?”

“I don’t know,” answered Agnes. “People are not always afraid. There was Jenny Bassett, Myra’s cousin, who died last summer of consumption: she had no more fear than you have of coming out here. And it was the same with young Mrs. Fletcher.”

“But it is so dreadful,” said the poor girl, shuddering, “to go away from every one you have ever known, out into another world, one doesn’t know where; and that fearful judgment!”

“I will tell you what I think, Cordelia, if you will try to be quiet, and not agitate yourself,” said Agnes.

“I am only a girl like yourself, you know.”

“Never mind. Tell me what you think.”

“It is just like this,” said Agnes: “if we are children of God, we don’t go out into a strange world among strangers. We go home to our Father’s house, as the chapter says, where He is, and where our Saviour has gone to prepare a place for us. We

don't know very much about it, to be sure ; sometimes I wish He had told us more. But we know that there will be no more pain, or sorrow, or death ; that our Lord will be there, and He will wipe away all tears from our eyes. So we shall not go among strangers. And, as to the judgment, I don't think we need fear that, because He says — See here." Agnes turned to the first chapter of the First Epistle of John, and read, —

"‘If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.’

"And there are other places where it tells of our sins being blotted out, and remembered no more. I don't think we need fear the judgment, after that."

"But that is for Christians, and I am not a Christian."

"But you may be, Cordelia."

"I don't know how."

"The Bible tells us. We have only to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and we shall be saved."

"That seems very simple and easy," said Cordelia doubtfully.

"That is what St. Paul said to the jailer when he asked what he should do to be saved, — believe on Him, and take Him for your Saviour ; that is all. Oh, do try ! You don't know what a difference it will make. I am not fit to teach you, — I have only just begun myself," said Agnes, blushing. "But I know how different every thing looks to me from what it did a week ago to-day. But, Cordelia, doesn't your minister ever come to see you ?"

"We haven't any, not really," answered Cordelia. "Mother and Milly don't belong to any church, and they don't go anywhere regularly. They just run about from one church to another to hear any famous preacher, or for the sake of the music. A lady we know — Miss Little — did use to talk to me sometimes when I was first sick, and she used to read good books to me; but mother did not like it. Last winter I wanted to see a minister, but she said he would only put gloomy thoughts in my head.¹ As if the gloomy thoughts did not come of themselves!"

"I hope I have not hurt you," said Agnes.

"No, indeed. You have done me good," said Cordelia. "You don't know what a comfort it is to open my mind to some one. But, Agnes, are you sure that is all, — just believing?"

"I am as sure as that I sit here."

"But why doesn't every one do it, then?"

"Well, you see, it involves a good many things. People have pet sins that they don't like to give up."

"That would be just my trouble," said Cordelia thoughtfully. "I know I am horridly cross and selfish a great many times; and I try not to be, but I always get beaten sooner or later."

"There is just where the help comes in," said Agnes eagerly. "If you ask Him, He will give you help to conquer those very things. Of course, we can't do it alone; but St. Paul says, 'I can do all things through Christ who strengtheneth me.'"

"How much you know about the Bible!"

"I ought to; I have had pains enough taken to

¹ A literal fact.

teach me. But, Cordelia, I dare say Dr. Madison will come to see you if you ask him. He is going to stay in Oldfield all summer."

"I will speak to mother about it. Agnes, you don't know how much good you have done me." She coughed as she spoke, and Agnes's quick eye saw that she was tired.

"Don't talk any more now," said she. "Let me turn your chair back, so that you can rest; and then I will read to you, and perhaps you will go to sleep. What would you like to hear?"

"I would rather hear the Bible than any thing," replied Cordelia, "I know so little about it. Begin the Gospel of St. John."

Agnes turned the reclining-chair into a comfortable couch, added another shawl to Cordelia's coverings, and sat down to read. Cordelia listened at first with earnest attention; but by degrees her eyelids drooped, and presently her soft, regular breathing showed that she was asleep.

"How like death she looks!" thought Agnes, as she gazed at the white cheek and almost transparent eyelids. "How can they think she is better? Well, at any rate, she has freed her mind, poor child. I am so glad I staid with her!"

Meantime Amelia Richmond had been engaged in a very different fashion.

"Why, Milly, I didn't expect to see you to-day," said Selina as they met at the church door. "How quickly you slipped away! I meant to ask you to come into Sunday school."

"Thank you," said Milly. "I don't go to Sunday

school, and I don't imagine I should gain very much from your dear cousin Celia's instructions."

"You might," returned Selina. "Father says cousin Celia is one of the best Bible scholars he ever knew. But we had Mrs. Van Zandt this morning. Cousin Celia is not well."

"What, the old lady? I would have staid if I had known that," said Milly. "What was she like?"

"I thought she was lovely," answered Selina. "She introduced our class to Dr. Madison, and he spoke to us so nicely. Didn't you like him this morning?"

"Not so very much," answered Milly. "I thought it was a canting, gloomy kind of sermon. I like intellectual preaching, about science and art, and so on."

"We don't go to church to hear about science and art, but to hear the gospel," said Selina.

"Oh, come, now, don't *you* begin," said Milly. "Has Miss Armstrong got you under her thumb already? She might well say she was coming on a mission to the heathen."

"I don't believe she said any such thing," returned Selina, coloring.

"I happen to know that she did. However, it does not matter. I ought not to have repeated it, I suppose, only I don't like to see people imposed upon. Miss Van Zandt's dress is not nun's veiling, Selina," added Milly, with a sudden change of subject, as Mrs. Van Zandt's carriage came in sight. "It is real China crape. I should not think she would wear such an expensive dress to church in the country,

especially as they are not rich ; but I dare say her aunt gave it to her."

"I must go to my seat," said Selina, feeling, for once, a desire to get rid of her companion.

"I will go with you," said Milly. "I like to sit up stairs : one can see every one so nicely."

Selina was not pleased ; but she had so often asked Milly to sit with her, that she did not know how to decline her company. Milly made herself very much at home, rather to the annoyance of Myra Bassett, with whom she was no favorite ; and she indulged herself very freely in making remarks upon the congregation.

"Do look at that woman in the blue bonnet with green and red flowers. I wonder where her milliner lives. I should like to employ her. Who is she ?"

"Mrs. Bettys. Do be quiet, Milly."

Milly was silent for a moment, and then began again.

"Do look at Mrs. Chase. What a figure she does make of herself ! With all her husband's practice, she might dress decently, one would think. Who are those girls in white, Selina ? I never noticed them before."

"The Jewsburys. They live in our district, but they hardly ever come to church. They were at the Bible class Thursday night, I remember."

"Oh, they are some of Miss Armstrong's heathen converts, I suppose. She means to get you all under her thumb."

This was a little too much for Myra's patience.

She leaned forward, and said in an energetic whisper, —

“Miss Richmond, will you please be quiet? We are not used to hearing such talk in the house of God.”

Milly tossed her head; but she saw the eyes of some of the elders fixed upon her, and she did not venture to say any more. All through the sermon, which was a continuation of the one in the morning, she did her best to distract Selina’s attention by writing notes and passing candy. Myra Bassett was furious. With all her good qualities, she had not her tongue under the most perfect government in the world; and, the moment service was over, she turned upon Selina.

“The next time you bring a stranger into the choir, Selina, I hope it will be some one who knows how to behave at least like a lady. I never was more ashamed in my life. I wonder what your father will say. It was a regular disgrace.”

“Don’t distress yourself, Miss Bassett,” said Milly, taking the words out of Selina’s mouth, as she was about to answer. “You are not responsible for my conduct. I hope every one could see that I do not belong here.”

“I hope so too,” returned Myra. “I should be sorry if they could not.”

“Do be quiet, Myra,” said Selina. “What a fuss you do make about nothing! I should think scolding and quarrelling in church was as bad as any thing Milly or I did. If you had been attending to the sermon, you would not have known any thing about us.”

Myra blushed. She felt, that, though her cause was just, she had put herself in the wrong by her hasty speech. She began to say something more, but Milly interrupted her.

"Oh, you need not apologize: I shall not bear malice," said she with a lofty tone of condescension. "We all know you are a well-meaning young woman, but you should think before you speak. When you have had more opportunities, you will know better. — Come, Selina;" and she drew Selina away, leaving Myra wondering how she had been put down, and why she should be so angry at being called a *young woman*. She did not consider that the simplest epithet may be made abusive by the way it is applied.

"Didn't I shut her mouth nicely?" said Amelia, laughing, when they reached the stairs. "She won't begin on me again in a hurry."

"Well, she was right," said Selina with some spirit; "I was ashamed, myself. What did make you act so, Milly?"

"What did I do?" asked Milly. "Are you going to set up too? But I see how it is," she added. "They have fairly conquered you, and broken your spirit among them, so that you don't care for me any more. The next thing, mother Weston will say, 'Selina, you must not go with Milly any more;' and then farewell to our friendship. You will never speak to me again."

Selina did not quite know what to say to this. She knew in truth that mother Weston did not approve of the intimacy.

"You will be setting up to be very pious next," continued Milly, as Selina did not reply. "We shall hear of you speaking in meeting; perhaps preparing to go on a mission, like dear Miss Armstrong."

Selina blushed, and Milly saw that her random shot had hit the mark. This conversation had taken place in a little recess under the gallery stairs, where the girls were out of sight. At that moment Selina heard her father's voice calling her, and went forward; Milly remaining where she was.

"Are you too tired to walk home, Selina?"

"No, father: I should like it."

"Then I shall take Mrs. West. Don't hurry, there is plenty of time. Go round by the brook, and you will have it shady all the way."

"Are you going to walk? Good! I will go with you," said Milly, joining Selina on the green before the church.

"I am going round by the brook," remarked Selina. "It will be longer for you."

"I don't care for that, unless you want to get rid of me. If you do, say so," returned Milly. Selina would have liked to say so, but she had not the courage; and the two walked on in silence for a few minutes. Then Milly began again:—

"So you really mean to give me up, Selina?"

"I have never said so," replied Selina.

"Actions speak louder than words," said Milly with a sigh. "Well, I suppose it is all right. You are dependent on Mr. and Mrs. Weston, and of course you ought to please them. Oh, yes, it is all right; but I am sorry. I thought we were going to

have such a nice time this summer ; but, if you are going to set up for a saint — However, you ought to please Mr. and Mrs. Weston, of course."

"I have never said either that I was going to give you up, or to set up for a saint," said Selina somewhat angrily. "I don't know what you want me to do, Amelia."

"I want you to be your own independent self, and not take all your opinions — your likes and dislikes, and all the rest — from some one else ; no, not even from Mrs. Weston or dear Miss Armstrong," replied Milly. "If Mrs. Weston were your own mother, it would be different, though even then I think you would have a right to a mind of your own. But come ; as you say, we won't quarrel. I do hope you won't give me up, Selina. You are the only friend I have. I never can get on with Agnes Gleason ; and Cordelia is worse than nobody, poor thing. I wanted mother to leave her at the Sanitarium with a nurse, and take me to Newport or Saratoga, where I could have some advantages of society ; but every thing is Cordelia with her. She would put me in the stove and burn me up to warm Cordelia's feet. But you won't give me up, will you, Selina ? I will promise not to say a word against religion. I am sure your mother would do me a great deal of good if she would only be kind to me. Come, now, say you will be friends."

What could Selina do but say she would always be friends with Milly ? The two girls sealed their league on the spot with a sentimental embrace ; and Milly began at once to exert her powers of conversation, which were not small, for the benefit of

her companion. She began with a description of a grand ceremony she had attended at the Roman-Catholic cathedral. From that, the divergence was easy to the park, and from thence to various gayeties, ending with a masked ball in which Milly had sustained a prominent character, had danced a minuet, and, according to her own account, had been the observed of all observers. When Selina reached home, all serious thoughts were completely dissipated. Her head was full of visions of that gay world in which Milly moved, and her heart of murmurs that she should be so wholly shut out of it. When she retired to her room after tea, it was not, as usual, to study her lesson for the next Sunday. The Bible lay untouched; while she indulged in dreams in which her own mother figured in the character of a lady of wealth and fashion, whom circumstances had compelled to abandon her child for a time, but who now turned up to claim her, and re-instate her in the splendor to which she was born. The birds of the air had picked up the seed pretty thoroughly.

CHAPTER XI.

NEW PROJECTS.

KIT's arm was better on Monday, but nothing more was said about her going to Oldbury. Symantha had an argument with Melissa on the subject of the place at Stillwell's, but Melissa was not to be moved. She knew her own mind, she said, and she could take care of herself. Symantha need not be troubled about her. She gathered her possessions together on Monday morning, and departed. The two sisters had never got on well together, and Melissa did not express any regret at parting. She did not speak to Kit; and Kit, on her part, made no secret of her pleasure on the occasion. Melissa had been her tyrant and torment ever since she could remember. It was she who had destroyed her cherished fragment of the "Pilgrim's Progress," and had instigated Phin to the burning of her beloved Testament. She felt sure that the proposition to send her to Stillwell's had come from Melissa in the first place. She did not feel safe till the wagon containing Melissa and her uncle was finally out of sight, and then it was with a rejoicing heart that she began to get ready for school.

"Well, Kit, I suppose you are perfectly happy to think that you are going to school this morning, instead of in the wagon going to Oldbury," said Symantha.

"Ain't you glad too?" asked Kit.

"Yes, I am. I don't want you to go to any place just now; certainly not there, to sell whiskey and beer."

"I never would do it," said Kit firmly. "They should cut me to pieces first. I hate the very name of drink. I don't believe uncle Phin would ever be ugly to me if he let the beer alone."

"I believe you are right," said Symantha, sighing. "I wish all the beer in the world were poured into the sea."

"Then the fishes would all get drunk," replied Kit, laughing. Then, with a sudden change of tone, as she glanced at Symantha's face, "Don't you want me to stay at home this morning? You will be alone all day."

"I thought you liked to go to school better than any thing," observed Symantha.

"Well, I do; but I would stay at home to help you."

"I know you would, but I would rather you went to school. I want you to learn all you can, now you have such a good chance."

"I wish uncle Phin would let me go to Sunday school, as the other girls do," said Kit. "There is not a girl in our school but me who does not go to Sunday school, and they get such nice books. I don't see what harm it would do."

"Nor I," answered Symantha. "You should go, Kit, if it depended upon me; but I don't think you had better say any thing about it at present. I am sure pa would not let you go, and it would only make a fuss. Make the best of your day-school, and learn all you can. There, good-by."

* Symantha kissed Kit, — an unusual demonstration of affection, — and the child went on her way with a light heart. She was happier than she had ever been before in her short life. She was used to the shadows of her home, — to her aunt's wretched state of health, and her uncle's varying humors, and Symantha's occasional impatience, — and did not mind these things as another child would have done. She loved with a kind of passion the beautiful things about her; all the more, that the last two years of her life had been spent in a wretched street of a wretched Western town, which had been left behind by an exhausted mine and an abortive railroad. She loved her school and her teacher, and found keen pleasure in the acquisition of knowledge for its own sake. And, above and beyond all, she rejoiced in her new-found inheritance in the kingdom of heaven. She had received it, indeed, as a little child, without a doubt or question. She could never be quite forlorn or alone again: for, let what would happen, she had a Father and a Saviour in heaven, who would never leave nor forsake her; and a home, sure to be hers some time, where she should never be unhappy, and never do wrong again. For there were times when the sense of sin pressed heavily upon her. She had never known that many things were wrong

which now appeared very dreadful to her. Like older people, she found herself hindered by "the bands of those sins which, by her frailty, she had committed," and from which she longed to be released. The temper would rise at any obstacle or annoyance; and the hard names and wicked words came to her mind, and fell from her lips, almost un^{er}awares. Now she felt these things to be sins, and grieved over them; but there was comfort even there. That same Father in heaven, whose name and nature had been so lately made known to her, hated sin; but then, He loved her, and therefore, Kit reasoned, He would help her to get rid of what He hated. It was a very happy little girl who went singing over the hill-pasture that morning.

Three or four weeks went on very quietly in Oldham, and especially in the red-schoolhouse district. In the village, indeed, there was a little stir, occasioned by the startling proposition brought forward by the church-wardens, in a parish-meeting called for the purpose in the parlor of the hotel; namely, that the church should be cleaned and painted before the arrival of the new minister. If it had been proposed to blow up the church with dynamite, some people could not have been more astonished; and the most astonished of all was Mr. Archimball, the shoemaker, who had been sexton for years. He had, for the most part, confined his duties to ringing the bell, making fires in winter, and dusting the great Bible and other books, and sometimes the pulpit-cushions, on a Sunday, and filling and trimming the lamps when they absolutely refused to burn any more without.

"Such a lot of new-fangled notions!" said he sulkily. "Always the way when women-folks take hold of things. What's the matter, anyhow?"

"The matter is, that the church is dirty, and needs cleaning," said Mr. Weston.

"Where's the dirt?" snarled the sexton. For answer Mr. Weston pointed to the windows.

"They *are* kind of cloudy, that's a fact," said Mr. Andrews, the storekeeper.

"*Kind of cloudy!* I should think so," said his wife. "I wonder what you would say, Mr. Andrews, to see such windows in your own house."

"Well, you know, Harriet Anne, you never thought of the windows yourself till last Sunday," said Mr. Andrews mildly.

"That's true, and more shame for me. Anyhow, I'm ready to do my share of the work."

"And so am I," "And I," added several voices; and more than one notable lady felt a thrill of joy at the thought of a house-cleaning upon so large a scale.

"The sisters seem to be all sound upon the cleaning question," said Mr. Weston, smiling.

"The women-folks are for any thing that will make a fuss, and give 'em a chance to gossip," muttered the sexton.

"Now about the painting," continued Mr. Weston, without noticing the interruption.

"That's another thing," said Mr. Blandy. "That will cost money."

"Most things do," said Dr. Chase.

"And how are you going to raise it? that's the question," continued Mr. Blandy.

"Yes, that's the p'int," said Aunt Betsy. "How are you going to raise it?"

"By subscription among ourselves," answered Mr. Weston. "I have made a calculation that two hundred dollars will cover the whole expense."

"Two hundred dollars is a good deal of money," said Mr. Andrews. "Still, if every one will do his share — Would that cover the blinds, think, squire?"

"Yes, I think so. As you say, if every one will do their share, the thing can be accomplished; not otherwise."

"Yes, but you'll see they won't," said the sexton. "It's one thing to stir up a lot of women, and another to get the men started."

"We have made a good beginning already, I am happy to say," remarked Mr. Weston, taking up a paper which lay before him on the table. "Dr. Chase has headed the list with twenty-five dollars; another person has put down the same; and the ladies at the stone house will give us twenty, and more if it is needed."

"Seventy dollars; that *is* a good beginning," said Mr. Bassett. "Put me down ten anyhow, Squire Weston. I will do more if I can, but that freshet which knocked down my dam has made it a kind of an expensive year for me."

"Put me down five," said Mr. Fletcher.

"Eighty-five dollars. Who next?"

"My sister and myself will give five dollars between us," said Miss Celia.

"Seems to me that's a good deal for you," said

Mrs. Burr ; but Miss Celia did not answer. It was a good deal ; but the two old ladies had consulted together, and had agreed to give up their annual summer visit to Elmfield if needful.

"I don't believe in this subscription business anyhow," said Mr. Blandy. "We might get up a fair, or dinner, or something, and raise the money that way, or at least a part of it ; and the rest might wait till it came handy to pay."

"And so saddle ourselves with a debt," said Dr. Chase. "No, thank you ; I have seen enough of that."

"Every one does it," persisted Mr. Blandy. "That fine new church in Oldbury has a twenty-thousand-dollar mortgage on it this minute."

"Yes, and what is the consequence ? Every time they try to raise money for some church or benevolent object, there comes up the debt. There is so much interest to be met, that great debt to be provided for, they can't even raise funds for a new Sunday-school library. No, no ! Bad as the church looks, I would rather it should stay so than that we should run in debt."

"That fifty dollars we raised for missions would come handy just now," said Mr. Blandy with a sneer. "I always thought charity began at home."

"It is to be hoped the charity of this church is not to begin, after an existence of nearly a hundred years," said Mr. Weston. "For my own part, I do not regard the money given to support my own church as given in charity, any more than that I use to pay my bills at Mr. Andrews's store. I get it all

back, and a great deal more. Which of us would be willing to do without the help we get here, even if it cost twice as much to keep the church going?"

"Nobody, I guess," answered Mr. Andrews. "I don't know but you are right, squire, though I must say I never looked at it in that way before. Well, you may put me down for twenty dollars, to begin with."

A few more subscriptions were given in, and a committee appointed to canvass the town. The ladies decided upon a day to begin operations, as a good deal of cleaning was absolutely needful before the painting could be commenced; and the meeting was about to be adjourned when Mr. Archimball rose up to fire his great gun, which he had kept till the last moment. He had much to say about his long and faithful services, extending over a period of twenty-five years. Twenty-five years he had rung that bell for service, and tolled it for funerals; yes, for the grandfathers and grandmothers of some of the folks present. But it appeared that folks were not satisfied. Very well. If he, Joseph Archimball, did not suit them, let them get somebody that did. He washed his hands of the whole business. He resigned his place as sexton. There were the keys of the church. He shook off the dust from his feet.

So saying, he threw down the keys on the table, and departed, rather wondering that no one tried to detain him.

"But they will be after me," he said to himself. "They won't find it so easy to do without me."

They will come asking me to take the keys again. But I won't — not unless they offer me at least ten dollars a year more than I have had before."

As the time went on, however, and nobody came after him, Mr. Archimball began to wish he had not been so hasty. As it drew toward the end of the week, he decided that he would not say any thing about that increase of salary; and on Saturday morning he made up his mind that he would go down and get the keys, open the windows, and even air out the cellar. The women-folks must be out of the way by that time. Lo and behold! when he reached the church, the windows were already open, and a young person of the colored persuasion was going about with a duster, — actually with a duster, and a feather duster at that, — daintily passing this unheard-of instrument over the backs of the old pews.

"Halloo!" said Mr. Archimball. "Who are you? and what are you doing here?"

"I am Edward Kettle, at your service," returned the stranger, with his best bow, which was, indeed, a very fine one. "As to what I am doing, I am putting the church in order for Sunday, seeing that the gentlemen has made me sexton."

Mr. Archimball felt that his great gun had "kicked," as sportsmen say. He could hardly believe his own senses.

"*You!*" he gasped, like the caterpillar in "*Little Alice.*" "Who are *you*?"

"I've told you my name already. As to my family, I am old Abner Kettle's grandson; and me and

my wife has come to live near the old gentleman. As I said before, the church has given me the appointment to take charge of this building, which the ladies has just cleaned up in the most elegant manner; and I calculate to do it."

So saying, Mr. Kettle hung up his duster, and, producing a sickle from his basket of tools, began a vigorous attack upon a colony of burdocks and thistles which had flourished at the side of the church steps from time immemorial.

To say that Mr. Archimball was disgusted, is to give a faint idea of his sensations. He was stunned. To think that he, he whose grandfather and great-grandfather were buried in that very burying-ground, should be turned out, supplanted by a colored man, and one who was half Indian at that! And for what? Just because people had taken some new notions into their heads about dust and air, and so on. It was too bad! He went home almost resolved never to enter the church doors again.

The subscription went on prosperously; and by Sunday Mr. Weston was able to announce that the money was raised, and every thing ready to begin the work. It was with no little satisfaction that the ladies who had been engaged in the cleaning looked at the clear glass, and noticed the difference in the air.

"Isn't it delightful to have the church so clean! and won't it be fine when it is all painted!" said Faith Fletcher to the other girls as they stood at the door for a moment before Sunday school. "And, oh, isn't it nice to have Dr. Madison again!"

"I wish we could have him all the time," said Agnes. "Don't you, Selina?"

"Oh, I don't know. I think I shall like Mr. Brace quite as well," answered Selina indifferently. "I don't see any thing so very remarkable about Dr. Madison's preaching. He just says the same things that one has always heard."

"He tells 'the old, old story,'" remarked Faith. "What do you think, Agnes?"

"I think the old story is better than any new one," replied Agnes. "What else could he tell us about? I thought you liked him ever so much last Sunday, Selina."

"I haven't said I didn't like him," said Selina rather shortly. "All I say is, that he isn't any thing so very wonderful. Why didn't Milly come this morning, Agnes?"

"I don't know that she had any reason, only that she did not care about it. She got a parcel of new books last night, and I fancy she preferred to lie abed and read. Mrs. Richmond staid with Cordelia."

"How is Cordelia?" asked Faith.

"Her mother will have it that she is better, but we think she fails all the time," answered Agnes. "Cordelia has given up all hope of ever getting well, herself. She wants to see a minister, and I asked Mrs. Richmond if I should not ask Dr. Madison to come over, as he is staying at Mrs. Van Zandt's; but she won't hear of it."

"How cruel!" said Faith.

"Well, no, she does not mean it for cruelty. She says she can't have Cordelia's mind filled with

gloomy ideas. She must be kept cheerful. She didn't like it a bit because I read the Bible to her last Sunday, and she hasn't let me be alone with her since."

"She is as bad as Phin Mallory with Kit," said Faith. "That poor child would give her eyes, almost, to come to Sunday school; and he won't let her. I do wish we could do something for her. She looked so sad when we were fixing the school-house for meeting last Friday. You can't scold her now for not knowing the Lord's Prayer, Selina: she reads her Testament every chance she finds."

"I suppose she does not have many books of any sort," remarked Faith. "But I do believe Kit is a real Christian. I never saw any child try harder to be good."

"She knows how to flatter Miss Armstrong, and get on the blind side of her," said Selina. "You needn't look so shocked. I do think so. Miss Armstrong thinks any one is perfection who can talk about religion. Amelia says she is just so in the city, and that it is the same with all the city missionaries. That is the way all sorts of humbugs impose upon them."

"Amelia knows all about city missions, no doubt," said Agnes. "How many mission Sunday schools do you suppose she ever saw? I don't believe Miss Armstrong has any blind side, to begin with; and I don't believe poor Kit ever thought of looking for it. She is a good, honest little thing, worth a hundred of Milly Richmond, and not so very much more ignorant, either. Just think! Milly did not know

that our Lord and the apostles were Jews, and she thought the ancient Romans worshipped the Virgin Mary."

"O Agnes!"

"She did, really."

"And you told of it," said Selina. "I don't think that is very nice, — to go telling of things that were said in your own mother's house, just to get people laughed at. I wonder what your dear Miss Armstrong would say to that?"

Agnes colored, and her eyes flashed. She did not speak for a moment, and in that moment she had gained a victory.

"She would say I was wrong, and so I was," said she quite gently. "You are right, Selina: it is not fair to tell tales. Come, we ought to be in our places."

The painting began next day, and, of course, took longer than any one expected. It was discovered that some other very essential repairs were needed. Indeed, when the committee appointed for the purpose came to examine the tower, they found it in a really dangerous condition.

"So you are going to repair the tower, too," said Aunt Betsy. "That will cost more money. It is always the way; when folks begin to tinker, there is no end to it. When the tower is done, you will find something else to do."

"There would be an end to somebody if we didn't begin to tinker," replied Mr. Weston, "and that pretty soon. A very little would have brought the bell crashing down into the porch. Suppose such a

thing had happened when the tower-room was full of the little children?"

"It makes me shudder," said Mrs. Weston. "Who noticed it first?"

"Edward told me, the very first time he rang the bell, that he thought there was something wrong; but I had no idea things were so bad till I came to look into them."

"Archimball never said any thing about it, did he?"

"Not he. I don't suppose he has been into the belfry for years. The fact is, we have all neglected our duty. Selina did not think what a very large kettle of fish she was going to stir up, when she made that proposition about cleaning the church."

"Yes, that is always the way when folks go to stirring up things," said Aunt Betsy. "Let well alone, I say."

"A great bell hung on a rotten beam over people's heads can hardly be called well," said Mr. Weston. "We may be thankful it was looked to in time."

"And what are we going to do for a church while all this fuss is going on?" asked Aunt Betsy.

"We shall meet in the large room at the academy."

"Well, nobody need think I am going there, to sit on those hard benches," said Aunt Betsy. "I shall just stay at home till things get in decent order again. — Abby, I should like to know what price you gave for this tea," she added, lifting to her nose the cup of black tea Mrs. Weston had just filled. "Seems to me you must have got cheated."

"It is the same tea we have been drinking all

winter, Aunt Betsy. I am sorry it does not suit you."

"Oh, I can drink it, I suppose," said Aunt Betsy with an injured air. "I calculate to get some myself as soon as I can go over to Oldfield. Mr. Andrews hasn't any that's fit to drink. He gave me a quarter of a pound, and I was glad when it was gone."

"That old lady isn't burdened with gratitude, is she?" said Miss Armstrong when Aunt Betsy had finally taken her tea and departed.

"I doubt whether the idea of gratitude has ever occurred to her mind," replied Mrs. Weston. "She thinks she has a right to all she gets, and a great deal more."

"Mrs. Richmond says she wonders the church don't put her into the widows' asylum at Oldbury," remarked Selina. "She was talking to Mrs. Blandy about it yesterday, and they both agreed it would be cheaper. Her place would sell for enough to pay her entrance fee and more."

"There would be several objections to that," replied Mr. Weston. "In the first place, she would never consent to go."

"She would have to go, I suppose, if people left off helping her."

"I doubt it; and, in the second place, there is no reason why she should go. Her land brings her in something, and the neighbors must do the rest. Why should we turn one of our old church-members over to the Oldbury folks to take care of, when we are able to do for her ourselves? There are a great

many more poor people in Oldbury than there are here."

"But she is so cross and disagreeable."

"Well, she may as well be cross and disagreeable here as in Oldbury," said Mrs. Weston. "If she is so trying when she only comes in now and then, what would she be to those who lived with her all the time? The poor old soul is as much attached to her home and her church as if she were the pleasantest person in the world, and it would be cruel to send her to finish her days among strangers."

"According to that, there need be no asylums of any sort, if people only took care of their own neighbors," said Selina.

"Perhaps we could not go so far as that, but certainly much fewer would be needed. You are quite right there," said Miss Armstrong. "As to poor Mrs. Burr, I can assure you, my dear, she is a very mild specimen of her class compared to some that I know. There is a woman in an aged-women's home that I know of, who regularly tells every one who comes to the house, never to get into that place if they can go anywhere else. I have known her, when the matron was conducting visitors through the house, to come out into the hall, and ask in the humblest tone if she might not have just a crust of bread, she was so faint and hungry, or if she might not have an old carpet or something to put on her bed, she was so cold at night. And yet she is really better off than ever she was before in her life."

"I dare say."

"Oh, well, we must not be too hard on Aunt

Betsy," said Mrs. Weston. "She is old and lonely, and we can very well bear with her humors. We are none of us any too grateful for what we receive."

Selina chose to take this remark to herself, though nothing was farther from Mrs. Weston's thoughts than such an application.

"If you think I am so ungrateful and unthankful, mother, I think I had better go and live somewhere else," said she, rising from the table, and bursting into tears. "I suppose I could earn my living; and, at any rate, I should not" — The rest was lost in sobs.

"What is the matter now?" said Mr. Weston in surprise.

"If you want to find fault with me, you might speak out, and not keep talking *at* me," sobbed Selina. "I wish you had never taken me from the asylum."

"Take care you do not make other people wish so," said Mr. Weston. "Now stop that noise at once. Go and wash your face, and then come and sit down to the table, and finish your supper. Do you hear me? and do you mean to mind me?" he added more sternly than before. "Come, we have had enough of this. If you will behave like a spoiled child, you must be treated like one. Do as I tell you."

Selina was frightened. Never had Mr. Weston spoken to her in such a tone before. He was one of the most even-tempered men in the world, and generally left the whole interior government of the family in his wife's hands. He had always been very

indulgent to Selina, and, on that very account, his severity was more effective now. As he kept his eye fixed on her, she felt that there was nothing for it but to obey. Not another word was addressed to her till supper was over, and Miss Armstrong had left the room. Then Mr. Weston turned to her.

"You will help your mother do up the work, and then you will stay at home," said he. "Don't let me see you running away up to Mrs. Gleason's, as you have done every evening this week. You must turn over a new leaf, Selina, or I shall have to do it for you. I will not have your mother and the whole family made uncomfortable by you. Now, remember."

Never in all the seven years she had lived at the farm had Selina met with such a reproof. She felt small enough as she went about clearing the table, and worst of all was the growing feeling that she had made herself ridiculous. She did up the work sulkily; and then, retiring to her own room, she threw herself on the bed without a word of prayer, and cried herself to sleep.

"I don't see what has come over Selina," remarked Mrs. Weston as she took her knitting and sat down with Miss Armstrong in the wide hall, which was much used as a summer sitting-room. "She is certainly in a bad state of mind. I don't think Milly Richmond does her any good."

"From the little I have seen, I should not think Miss Richmond's society was calculated to be useful to any one," said Miss Armstrong. "She did me the favor to come to school as a visitor one afternoon

last week, and certainly I never wish to have her visit repeated. It seems to me that poor Selina's great stumbling-block is her disposition to jealousy."

"Yes, that is the great trouble, and always has been," replied Mrs. Weston, sighing.

"It is a hard fault to deal with, because the person possessing it is so apt to take it for a virtue, or at least a mark of superiority," said Miss Armstrong. "However, it is a comfort that grace can conquer that as well as every other infirmity."

"I hoped that Selina was coming under the power of religion," said Mrs. Weston.

"And so did I. The first week or two after I came, she seemed much interested in the Bible lessons, and talked quite freely on the subject; but latterly I cannot get her to speak a word, and hardly to answer a question."

"Sometimes I think she is resisting conviction, and that makes her more irritable than she would be," remarked Mrs. Weston. "How does she behave in school in other ways?"

"I see an unfavorable change there, too," answered Miss Armstrong. "The first week she was a great help to me. I cannot say as much now."

"She is at a trying age," said Mrs. Weston, using the universal mother's excuse, which suits all ages from one to twenty-one. "Sometimes I think the fault must be in my management, and yet I don't know. I have never made any difference between her and Lizzy, and Lizzy never gave me an hour's anxiety in her life except from illness. I hear that Agnes Gleason means to be confirmed."

"Yes, she has quite decided to take the first opportunity. Her mother seems very much pleased."

"I was a little surprised when she said as much to me on Sunday," said Mrs. Weston. "Mrs. Gleason has never made any profession of religion. We thought she would do so when my sister and myself united with the church, and I dare say she would if her own mother had been alive. But she was boarding with Aunt Betsy at that time, and she held the child back. I think it was a great mistake."

"I believe it is a mistake in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred."

"I quite agree with you. Who is this coming in?"

"It is Ida Van Zandt and her cousin," said Miss Armstrong, rising. "You will like these girls, Mrs. Weston. They are as thoroughly genuine as any I ever knew."

Mrs. Weston was quite prepared to like her young neighbors. She went to call Selina; but Selina had gone to bed, and pretended to be asleep. The girls had two errands besides their desire to see Miss Armstrong. One was, to procure some guinea-hens' eggs. Amity had heard that Mrs. Weston had a very superior breed of guinea-hens, and she wanted to send some home to her grandfather, who was a great fowl-fancier.

"You had better let me give you a pair of the fowls when you go home. That will be the best way," said Mrs. Weston. "Eggs are rather uncertain, but I can let you have some to eat if you think your aunt would fancy them. They are very delicate."

"Thank you very much," said Amity. "I shall be glad of any thing to tempt aunt Barbara's appetite, for she is not very well just now. But, Mrs. Weston, I did not mean to beg your beautiful fowls."

"Oh, you are quite welcome. We should not keep them, and I am just so silly I would rather give the poor things away than have them killed, I have made such pets of them."

"I don't think it silly at all. I have just the same feeling," said Amity. "But if you please, Mrs. Weston, we will make it an exchange; I see you keep ducks, and I will have O'Connor send you a pair of our new Pekin ducks. They are the present rage in our parts. — And now for your errand, Ida," said Amity when these matters had been satisfactorily settled.

"Oh," said Ida, blushing. "Perhaps I ought to begin with an apology for 'assumacy,' as old Alice calls it. It has occurred to me, Miss Armstrong, that, as almost all the children seem to come to the Friday-evening service, it would be rather a nice thing to meet them some time during the week and practise upon the hymns. What do you think?"

"I think it an excellent plan," answered Miss Armstrong. "I have been regretting, ever since I came here, that I cannot sing. I suppose you mean to teach the class yourself, Ida?"

"Oh, yes: I am to be professor."

"I proposed something of the sort to Selina," said Miss Armstrong, turning to Mrs. Weston; "but she seemed to think it would not do."

"I don't see any objection to it," said Mrs. West-

on; "that is, supposing Miss Van Zandt is willing to take the trouble."

"Oh, I shall like it," answered Ida. "I do think I have some gift that way, too, though I say it that shouldn't. I have taught singing in our mission school for two winters; and really they do very well, don't they, Amity?"

"Indeed they do; but I fancy you will find it rather different teaching Miss Armstrong's children."

"I should imagine so," said Ida, laughing. "I heard a lady on Sunday talking about those little Irish children in the infant-class, and saying they ought not to be allowed to come in such a state. I wondered what she would say to your infants, Amity."

"Oh, my infants are not so bad. Even the Flynns come with clean faces now and then. Norah had a patch on her dress the last Sunday, and actually a clean apron."

"Mrs. Weston opens her eyes," said Ida.

"Oh, I have seen mission schools, though I never taught in one," said Mrs. Weston, smiling. "I should think it might be trying work sometimes."

"Well, it is; and yet it has its rewards too."

"Where is Mr. Weston?" asked Miss Armstrong. "We must have his sanction before we do any thing."

"What a lovely woman!" said Ida as Mrs. Weston went out to call her husband. "Is she as sweet as she looks?"

"Sweeter, if any thing."

"Her daughter does not look at all like her," said Amity. "She is a handsome girl, too; but she has a

discontented, almost envious expression. She has a fine voice : I noticed it on Sunday."

"Yes, I think she would sing uncommonly well if she would take more pains. Mr. Weston is as good as his wife. I never met two more excellent people."

"Is Selina the only child?"

"No, they have a married daughter in Oldbury, — a very lovely woman in all respects. Both she and Selina are adopted children ; and they had another, a very fine young man, who died a year or two since. They have had several children of their own, who all died in infancy. Here comes Mr. Weston. You must sing for him, Ida : he loves music, and understands it too."

Mr. Weston listened attentively while Ida unfolded her plan; which was to meet the school-children twice a week, and sing with them the hymns and tunes used in Sunday school and at the Bible class, and any other music which might be deemed desirable.

"It seems a very nice plan," said Mr. Weston, "but it is a good deal for you to do."

"I shall enjoy it," said Ida. I love children, and the practice will keep my hand in. Of course I shall not give them much instruction in the theory of music, but perhaps they may learn to read notes. I think children pick that up pretty easily."

"Well, Miss Van Zandt, I will talk it over with the other trustees," said Mr. Weston. "I can't think any one will object, but there is no telling. I expect we are going to have a fight over the Bible-reading at the next school-meeting. Phin Mallory says he means to put a stop to it ; and like as not Tom Jews-

bury will support him, just to show off what he calls his liberal ideas.”

“If they turn the Bible out, they will turn me out,” said Miss Armstrong. “I will never teach in any school where the Bible is shut out.”

“Oh, they won’t succeed, — we have not many of that sort, — but they will make a fuss.”

“Perhaps it will be better not to have any connection between the singing-school and the day-school,” remarked Amity. “Ida might just ask for the loan of the schoolhouse for her class to meet in.”

“And I will have it directly after school, because then the children are together, and it is the most convenient hour for me,” said Ida. “Yes, that will be best.”

“People will be asking what your terms are,” said Mr. Weston, smiling.

“But I haven’t any terms,” said Ida. “I don’t propose to ask any thing, Mr. Weston. It is just because I like children, and because it is so nice for them to know how to sing.”

“Well, I will let you know in a day or two. Meanwhile, perhaps you will sing something for me.” Ida complied at once, and sang song after song, grave and gay. She had a noble voice which had received every advantage of cultivation, and had *not* been spoiled thereby.

“That is grand!” said Mr. Weston. “I’ll tell you what, mother, if any one makes an objection, we’ll just ask Miss Van Zandt to come in and sing for them.”

"One thing more," said Miss Armstrong; "that is, if you are not tired, Ida."

"Not at all. I am never tired of singing."

"Then sing 'I know that my Redeemer liveth.'"

"I am not sure that I can do it justice," said Ida: "I have not tried it in some time. But I will do my best."

There was a moment's silence after that most beautiful of all sacred songs was concluded, and then Mr. Weston and his wife both drew a long breath.

"That is wonderful!" said Mrs. Weston. "How I wish Selina could sing that!"

"I dare say she could learn," replied Ida. "She has a fine voice. I noticed it in church. It is a pity it should not be cultivated."

"I have always meant Selina should have some good singing-lessons," said Mr. Weston. "I have thought of sending her to her sister's in Oldbury. They have an excellent professor in the school there, or so I have been told."

"Really, Ida, we must go," said Amity: "it is growing dark. Aunt Barbara will think we are lost."

"I will walk with you, if you will allow me," said Mr. Weston. "I was going over to the Corners, at any rate, and your house is but a few steps out of my way."

"What charming girls!" said Mrs. Weston. "Miss Bogardus's money does not seem to have spoiled her."

"Not a bit. She is one of the hardest-working, most self-denying girls I ever knew. Ida is a good child too."

"It shows that wealth and beauty do not of them-

selves hurt people. I hope this singing-school may be a success, for Selina's sake," said Mrs. Weston.

But Selina had already made up her mind on that point. She had been waked by the singing, and had been listening with all her ears. Envy and jealousy are reptiles that can find food anywhere, — even in heaven, if they could get there.

"Her voice isn't one bit better than mine," Selina said to herself: "it is only that she has had such good lessons. I don't think she sings so much better, either. I don't see what call she has to be setting up a singing-school here. We don't want any of her patronage." And Selina resolved, that, if she could help it, the singing-school should not be a success.

CHAPTER XII.

HARMONY AND DISCORD.

THE trustees made no objection to the singing-school; and in two or three days Miss Armstrong announced that Miss Van Zandt would meet after school such of the children as would like to learn to sing.

"Any of us? little ones and all?" asked Ednah Fletcher.

"Little ones and all; every one who would like to learn to sing nicely in church and Sunday school. Miss Van Zandt is very kind to give up so much time to you, and I hope you will reward her by being very good and attentive."

"I am sure I will," said Kit. "I think she is *awful* good."

"Yes, very kind indeed," said Selina when school was dismissed. "For my part, I am not so fond of being patronized by city people."

"If city people want to do me a kindness, I am willing they should," said Faith.

"Well, I don't know," answered Selina. "I don't think we were quite ignorant heathen before Miss

Armstrong and Miss Van Zandt came here, though one would think so to hear them talk."

"Why, what do they say?" asked Lucinda Hurd.

"Oh, Miss Van Zandt says she is used to teaching in mission schools, and wants to keep her hand in; and Miss Armstrong says she would not teach here at all if it were not for teaching the Bible."

Faith and Agnes exchanged a glance which annoyed Selina. It seemed as if they were laughing at her.

"Where did you hear all this?" asked Sarah. Selina thought there was some incredulity in the tone, and she answered positively, —

"I heard her in our house, the very night Miss Van Zandt came there to talk about this singing-school concern."

"Oh," said Sarah demurely. "I thought I heard somebody delivering a lecture to Agnes on Sunday about repeating what was said in her mother's house, that was all."

Selina colored scarlet, and wished she had held her tongue.

"If you have such a dislike to being patronized by city people, I wonder you should care to go so much with Milly Richmond," continued Sarah. "She *is* patronizing. I could hardly help laughing at the tone in which she talked to Miss Armstrong about her little country seminary and her 'little rustics.'"

"What *is* 'patronizing'?" asked Kit, who had been listening to the conversation with wide-open eyes.

"'Patronizing,' little one? Why, I hardly know how to define it," said Sarah. "It really means, to

defend or support; but I suppose, as Selina uses it, it means to do good to any one in a condescending way, as if you were a great deal better than they."

"Then I am sure Miss Van Zandt is not a bit patronizing," said Kit eagerly. "She doesn't put on one bit of airs."

"Pray, what do *you* know about it?" asked Selina. "Where have you seen Miss Van Zandt, I should like to know?"

The tone was rude enough to bring the color to Kit's face; but she answered quietly, —

"I have seen her two or three times. She and Miss Bogardus have been very kind to me. They gave me my Testament and my hymn-book."

"Well, I must say I agree with Selina," said Lucinda Hurd. "I don't want any stuck-up city-folks coming and doing good to *me*."

"I don't believe you are in any danger of being done good to," said Sarah. "For my part, I mean to learn all I can. Miss Van Zandt does sing splendidly."

"Ezra says he never heard such a voice in his life," said Faith Fletcher. Now, Ezra Fletcher was a college senior, and a great personage in the red-schoolhouse district.

"Oh, very well; go and be patronized if you like," said Selina. "I shall not, that's all."

"Selina, are you ever coming home?" asked Milly Richmond, appearing round the turn of the road just by the schoolhouse. "I have been waiting for you half an hour at least," she added, putting her arm

through Selina's, with a condescending nod to the rest of the girls as she walked away.

"There's distinguished city breeding for you," said Sarah.

"What is the use of calling it *city* breeding?" asked Agnes: "it is no more city than country. One sees underbred people everywhere."

"City-folks always are stuck up, anyway," said Lucinda. "They always look down on country-folks."

"I don't think so. Dr. Madison did not talk to us in Sunday school as though he looked down on us."

"Not half as much as Mr. Martin used to," observed one of the girls. "It used to make me sick to hear him begin, 'Now, my dear children,' and then go on to talk baby-talk for half an hour. I just hated to go. Dr. Madison talks sense, and so did Mr. Brace when he was here. And Mr. Martin was no such great man: his father used to keep a little candy-shop over in Oldfield when my mother went to school there."

"It is nothing against Mr. Martin if he did," said Sarah. "Keeping a candy-shop is an honest trade."

"It is a sweet trade anyhow," said Faith. "I should like to keep a candy-shop myself, and then I could have all the candy I wanted."

"But, suppose it wasn't an honest trade, would that be any thing against Mr. Martin?" asked Kit. "He wouldn't be to blame for what his father did, would he?"

"Well, no, I suppose not," answered Faith rather doubtfully; "but people think a great deal of family about here."

"Of course he would not," said Sarah decidedly. "If a man is good, he is good, and if he is bad, he is bad, whatever his father was. Mr. Martin was a good man, but he was no hand to manage a Sunday school."

"If I could go to Sunday school, I don't think I should care very much who managed it," said Kit sadly.

"Can't you?" asked Eddy.

"No: uncle Phin won't let me. I couldn't help crying last Sunday when I sat up on the hill, and watched the children coming out with their books."

"Think of that, Eddy," said Faith. "Somebody I know cried last Sunday for a very different reason from that."

Eddy blushed at the recollection, and made up her mind that she would never quarrel with her Sunday-school lesson again.

"You will come to the singing-school, won't you, Kit?" said Sarah.

"Yes, if they will let me. I think it is lovely in Miss Van Zandt to teach us, don't you?"

"I think it is very nice of her. Good-night, little one." As she kissed Kit she added, "Don't be down-hearted, Kit; I hope better times will come for you by and by."

"Won't you please ask God to let me go, Sarah?" whispered Kit as she returned Sarah's kiss.

"You love Him, don't you?" said Sarah.

"Yes; and I love you too," answered Kit, "you are so kind to me."

"It would be a hard-hearted creature that could be

any thing but kind to such a kitten as you. Come home with me, and I will give you some flowers."

"Oh, thank you!" answered Kit gratefully. "Aunt Martha loves flowers better than any thing."

"What were you all talking about?" asked Milly of Selina as they walked down the road together. "You seemed wonderfully interested."

"About Miss Van Zandt's singing-school. She is going to set up a singing-school for the enlightenment of us ignorant savages here in the country."

"A singing-school! What do you mean?"

Selina told the story, adding, "But I am not going, I can tell her. I don't want any of her patronage."

"I think you will be very silly if you don't," was Milly's unexpected rejoinder.

"I don't know why I should take lessons of her," said Selina. "I don't know why I can't sing as well as Miss Van Zandt."

"Because you have not her voice nor her training," returned Milly. "Why, Selina, the idea of comparing your singing with Ida Van Zandt's! She is Signor A.'s crack pupil; and I know Professor G., who trains the Handel Chorus Society, considers hers the best female voice he has. Not but you do sing very well, considering; but the idea of comparing yourself to Ida Van Zandt!"

Selina had often admired and defended Milly's bluntness, which she called frankness and sincerity; but she did not find this same frankness so pleasant when it was applied to herself. She had a great opinion of her own powers; and to have that opinion

so coolly set aside was almost more than she could bear, even from Milly.

"You were talking the other day of your voice making you independent," continued Milly. "If I thought of any such thing as that, I would not lose such a chance as this of singing with Miss Van Zandt. I have no more voice than a crow, and no talent for music anyway; but if I had, I would go down on my knees to her to let me come."

"I am not in the habit of going down on my knees to people," said Selina loftily; "I am not so fond of being patronized."

"I call that nonsense," replied Milly, who possessed a certain common-sense which might have made her a valuable woman under good training. "In the first place, nobody wants you to go down on your knees, or to be patronized either. I dare say Miss Van Zandt never thought of such a thing. All Mrs. Van Zandt's set are engaged in missions or some such work. Ida teaches in the St. Timothy's School, I know, when she is in town, and in another in the country; and so does Miss Bogardus."

"That is just what I say," persisted Selina. "I don't want to be made a mission of."

"Anybody might make a mission of me who would teach me to sing like that," said Milly. "And, as to patronage, you ought to see how ladies in society will contrive and plan and scheme to get invitations from those who are a little more fashionable than themselves. I believe ma would not only go on her knees, but walk on them across Fifth Avenue,

to get a card for Mrs. Anderson's Fridays or one of Mrs. Van Zandt's quiet lunch-parties."

"I call that downright mean," said Selina.

"Oh, well, every one does it. I wouldn't go as far as some do, myself; but I would like to know the Van Zandts."

"How is Cordelia to-day?" asked Selina, willing to turn the conversation.

"She is about the same; I don't think she is quite as well. Mother left her with Agnes on Sunday, and Agnes must go to reading the Bible and talking pious to her; and ever since, she thinks she is going to die, and is always wanting to have Dr. Madison come to see her. Mother won't hear of it, though; and she was angry enough with Agnes for putting it into her head."

"But if she should die, Milly, your mother would be sorry she did not let her have her own way."

"She isn't going to die," said Milly angrily. "I believe she would be a great deal better if she would exert herself a little. Not but what I would let her have her own way in this, and so I told ma," she added in a gentler tone. "Dr. Madison is a nice old gentleman, and I don't believe he would hurt her. But, as to this singing-school business, Selina, you will be very foolish if you don't go."

"I can judge for myself, I suppose," said Selina.

"All right; judge for yourself all you like. It is the last time I shall ever offer you any advice, you may be sure of that," returned Milly. "I had no idea you were such a grand personage, or I would not have ventured on such a liberty. Good-after-

noon, Miss Weston, or whatever your name is. I won't trouble you any further." And Milly turned and walked away.

Selina was confounded for the moment. Like other passionate people, she was always surprised and aggrieved when any one else showed any temper. To do Milly justice, such outbreaks were rare with her. She had not reached home before she told herself that she had been silly to mind Selina's tantrums, and resolved that she would make up on the first opportunity. She forgot that she had dealt Selina a cruel and cowardly blow in the allusion to her name, knowing, as she did, how sensitive Selina was on that point. Selina stood still a moment, and then, turning round, walked rapidly toward home.

"I will never speak to her again, — never," she said to herself. "And I will not go to the singing-school either, if I can help it. I suppose, though, I shall have to, or make a fuss at home. They are all bewitched with this Ida Van Zandt, and Milly is as bad as the rest. I wish she had never come here."

The singing-school began prosperously with a full attendance. All the children came; and a good many grown people would have liked to do so, but Ida good-naturedly but firmly declined having any pupils outside of the school.

"It is only for the little ones," she explained. "And I find they do their best when I have them by themselves. Besides, I am not setting up for a teacher: I am only practising a little with the children."

Selina made up her mind to attend the class, partly

because she could not contrive any valid excuse for not doing so, and partly because on consideration she was obliged, however unwillingly, to own that Milly's advice was good. It would be foolish to throw away such a chance for improvement; and moreover, if she did, Mr. Weston might make it a reason for refusing to let her have singing-lessons in Oldbury. As may be guessed, she was not in a very good frame of mind for profiting by the lessons, since her chief end and aim was, to show that she could sing as well as her teacher.

To Kit the singing-lessons were a source of un-mixed joy. She had a real genius for music, and a wonderfully quick ear, which caught in a moment all the beauties of Ida's style, and reproduced them in a manner quite marvellous to the other girls.

"Kit will beat us all," cried Faith in honest admiration. "What a beautiful voice she has!"

"Yes, she is going to make a fine singer," said Ida. "But we must not let her practise too much for a year or two, or she will hurt her voice. She sings with a great deal of expression. Now, you must all be very attentive, because I am going to give you a lesson on reading the notes."

Symantha made no objection to Kit's singing-lessons, and nothing had been said to Phin about them. He was away in Oldbury a good deal of the time, and often came home in a very bad humor. Kit kept out of his way at these times as much as possible. She noticed that Symantha's face began to assume the old anxious expression, which it had almost laid aside for a few months past; and she

shrewdly guessed, that, as she said, "uncle Phin was going wrong again." One day she came home with a very grave, not to say scared, expression, and followed Symantha into the pantry.

"Symantha, do you remember that man who used to keep the saloon in our street in Goldsburg, — the one they said shot the peddler?"

"Yes," answered Symantha, startled. "What of him?"

"I saw him this afternoon," said Kit.

"Impossible, child! He is in State-prison, and long may he stay there!"

"He is not in State-prison now," persisted Kit. "I tell you I saw him this afternoon. I met him down by the bars, and he walked part of the way home with me. I was scared, I can tell you."

"What did he say to you?"

"He asked the nearest way to Oldfield, and I told him: and then he asked who lived in Mr. Weston's house, and in Mrs. Van Zandt's; and I told him. Then he said he supposed Mrs. Van Zandt was very rich, and I said I didn't know any thing about it. He asked if I had ever been in the house, and I said, 'No.' Then he offered me a quarter, and I told him I didn't take money from strangers."

"Quite right," said Symantha. "But, Kit, I think you must be mistaken. Are you sure?"

"Quite sure, and I will tell you how. He has bleached his hair, and got white whiskers; but don't you remember one of his eyes was of two colors? He could not change that, and I knew him by it directly."

Symantha's face grew dark. "I thought he was out of the way, at least," said she. "I wonder what brings him here."

"He said he was going to Oldfield, and wanted to know the shortest road. I was glad when he walked on, for I am always afraid of him."

"He is a wicked wretch," said Symantha. "I have heard that he was born somewhere about here. Well, don't say a word, Kit. You were quite right not to answer his questions."

"I hope he won't get hold of uncle Phin," said Kit. "I thought he would get out of his old ways when he came to this nice place, and had the farm and all."

"And so did I ; but, when people are bound to go to destruction, they will go," said Symantha, with a sigh which was almost a groan.

"It is too bad of uncle Phin, because he is so nice when he is good," said Kit. She paused, and then added timidly, "Symantha, why don't you ask our Father in heaven to make uncle Phin good? Don't you believe He could?"

"I don't know, child ; I suppose so. Do you believe it?"

"Yes, I do. There was the thief on the cross : I read about him this morning. And I know other wicked people have been made good."

"Well, child, pray for him, then, and for me too, if you like. I am sure I am glad if you take comfort in that or any thing else. How do you get on with your singing-school?"

"Oh, nicely !" replied Kit with animation. "We

have learned 'Jesus, lover of my soul,' and 'There is a green hill far away,' and 'Onward, Christian soldiers.' That is splendid. They are going to sing it in meeting to-morrow night," said Kit with a sudden change of tone. "Don't I wish I could go!"

"Don't you wish you could go where?" asked Phin. He had left his boots at the door, and come quietly in in his stocking-feet, so that no one had heard him.

"To meeting," said Kit, rather alarmed, but standing her ground, and half hoping her uncle might relent.

"Well, you won't do any such thing."

"I don't see what harm it would do," said Kit. "If it is all nonsense, as you say, it would do no more hurt than going to the circus or the theatre; and you used to let me go there. And if it is true"—

"Hush, Kit," said Symantha.

"True or false, you won't go. And you are not going near that schoolhouse for any thing again. Do you hear?"

"Not to school?" faltered Kit.

"No!" thundered Phin. "Not to school nor for any thing else. If you say another word I will take you over to Oldbury, and set you to drawing beer at Stillwell's. I was a fool not to do it before."

Kit's own temper flamed up. "I'll never draw beer at Stillwell's nor anywhere else," said she. "I hate the beer,—it is that makes you so ugly, uncle Phin,—and I'll never touch it."

"You won't, eh? You will go down cellar and get me a glass this minute."

"I won't."

"Father!" said Symantha warningly, but Phin was not to be controlled. He had come home from Oldbury vexed at losing money in gambling, irritated as a weak man always is at the slavery to which he was reduced by his own weakness, and ready to visit that irritation on the first helpless object that came in his way. He took Kit in his arms despite her struggles; and, carrying her down stairs, he set her down, and ordered her to draw the beer. But Kit was by this time quite beside herself with rage; and the old habit asserted itself, as old habits will with the best of us at times.

The beer-keg stood on a table at quite a height from the floor. With a volley of hard words, Kit seized it, and, by a sudden exertion of strength, flung it violently to the ground. The head, coming in contact with a large stone, was smashed in, and the beer poured out on the cellar-bottom.

"There's your beer drawn for you," said she. "Now drink it."

Phin's rage was something fearful. He whipped Kit till her screams alarmed him. "There, now go to bed; and don't let me see you again to-night," said he, releasing her at last. "Come, we'll know who is to be master."

Kit crept away to bed, trembling so she could hardly stand. Sorely beaten as she was, the pain was the least of her troubles. That which she had most feared had fallen upon her. To stay away from school,—that was the worst. To have no Miss Armstrong to go to in her troubles; to have no one

to answer her questions, and explain to her what she did not understand, — oh, it was too dreadful to think of! Symantha watched her chance, and brought the child some supper; but she could not eat. Even her prayers seemed to bring her no comfort. She had been so wicked! She had been so angry, and used such bad words! What if she should never be forgiven? She slept only in snatches till the cocks began to crow, and the light to shine into her uncurtained windows. Then she rose, and sought her Testament in the place where she kept it hidden. As she read, her face became calmer, and she ceased her sobs. Yes, she had been very naughty; but He would forgive her as He had forgiven Peter, who cursed and swore. Hope was not all gone, as she had thought the night before. Her Guardian was still in heaven. He saw and knew it all. He would forgive her, and take her part. Kit kneeled and poured out her heart in prayer; and then, lying down, she fell at last into a deep, quiet slumber.

CHAPTER XIII.

KIT'S VICTORY.

WHEN Kit came down stairs, she found breakfast ready, and her uncle just come in.

"Halloo ! here's the saint," said he roughly. "Come, let us hear some more of those pretty words you said last night, — those nice lessons Miss Armstrong teaches you down there."

"Uncle Phin," said Kit, growing pale, but speaking firmly, "I never learned those words from Miss Armstrong, and you know it. I am sorry I said them : it was very wicked. And I am sorry I struck you."

"Humph !" said Phin, considerably taken aback. "And what about the beer ? Are you sorry for that too ?"

"No," answered Kit. "I should like to do as much for all the beer-kegs in the world. You are never ugly to me only when you have been drinking beer."

"Humph !" said Phin. "There, hold your tongue, and eat your breakfast ; but mind, you are not going to school."

Kit dared not say any more. Phin did not go to

Oldbury, but staid about the house doing odd jobs of repairing, and waiting upon his wife, who had been very unwell for several weeks. His fondness and tenderness for her was one of his best traits. He never spoke harshly to her in his worst moments, and would take any amount of pains to give her a little comfort. Symantha brought out her basket of mending, and asked Kit to help her with the stockings ; saying, with a meaning look, —

“ You can take your work up in your own room, if you like. I am going to clean the floor.”

Kit understood, as well as if the words had been spoken, that Symantha meant to give her a chance to read. She fastened her door, and, having despatched her task of mending neatly and quickly (for, thanks to Symantha's training, she was an expert needle-woman), she drew her precious “*Pilgrim's Progress*” from its hiding-place, and read for a long time. Then she got out her Testament, and read the two last chapters of St. Luke's Gospel. She was going through the book in course, wondering and delighted more and more at all she found there. Her lively imagination and quick sense of the beautiful gave reality to all the stories ; and she pondered over them as she walked to and from school, or drove up the cows from their pasture, or helped Symantha with the sewing. This morning she was deeply impressed with the story of the Resurrection. She seemed to see it all, — the women coming to the sepulchre (something like the burial-vaults she had seen in the cemetery at St. Louis, she thought) in the early morning, while it was yet dark ; the visit of the apostles ;

Mary mourning by herself, not recognizing her risen Lord in the perplexing dusk of the early twilight, till he called her by name.

Her meditations were interrupted by a call to dinner.

"Where is uncle Phin?" she asked.

"He is sitting with ma. She is very bad to-day."

"I have not heard her."

"No, she has not spoken at all; and I cannot persuade her to eat a mouthful.—Come, father; come to dinner."

The meal passed almost in silence.

"Let me wash up the dishes," said Kit after it was finished. "You look so tired!"

"I did not suppose such a fine lady as you are could wash dishes," said Phin. "I dare say Miss Armstrong never washed a dish in her life."

Kit made no answer. She was determined not to be provoked again if she could help it. She did up the work neatly; and then, taking her hat and her book, she went up to her old resting-place on the hill, from whence she could see the schoolhouse. It would be something even to look at the roof which held Miss Armstrong, and where had been passed the happiest hours of her life. She knew just what was going on, and could almost see the larger girls engaged in preparing their grammar lesson, and the little ones taking it in turn to read their small tasks by Miss Armstrong's side. It would be about Jenny Hurd's turn now, she thought. She would lean against Miss Armstrong. Perhaps Miss Armstrong's arm would be around her. What would she not give

to be in her place ! Jenny did not like to come to school, and would rather play all day ; and yet Jenny could have the privilege from which she was shut out. It was very strange, Kit thought.

"Anyhow, uncle Phin can't ever take away from me what I have learned. He never can make things as they were before I knew Miss Armstrong ; nothing in the world can do that. And they are things which will last for ever and ever," said Kit, half aloud, realizing in her sorrow the truth which has come to so many other people in times of change and bereavement, — that the things which are seen are temporal ; while it is only the things which are not to be seen by mortal eyes, or handled by mortal hands, that are real and eternal. Then another thought occurred to Kit, which made her take out her little Testament, already showing signs of the wear it suffered by being carried in her pocket. She turned to the second chapter of St. Matthew's Gospel, and was soon so deeply engaged in study that she started as if she had been shot when Ida spoke to her.

"Why, Kitty ! how does it happen that you are not in school ?"

"Uncle Phin won't let me go," answered Kit, with a quivering lip. "He says I shall not go any more."

"But that is a great pity, when you were getting on so nicely," said Amity. "Why did he say that ?"

"He got angry at me," said Kit. "I was naughty, I know ; but I don't think that was the reason. It was just because he was put out about something else. I was in hopes he had forgotten all about it

this morning, — he does that way very often, — but he says I shall never go there again.”

“We will hope that he will change his mind, as you say he has done so before. What are you doing now?”

“Learning verses out of the Testament,” answered Kit. “I was thinking that uncle Phin nor any one else could take away the things I had learned. And then I thought, ‘What if I should lose my Testament again, or go where I couldn’t have any teaching?’ So I made up my mind to learn as many verses as I could; because, don’t you see, nobody can take away the things I have in my mind.”

Ida and Amity exchanged glances.

“Other people besides you have done that, little Kitty,” said Amity. “Last summer I went to visit a mountainous country in Europe, where live a brave and good people who for many hundred years were dreadfully persecuted on account of their religion. The popes, and the governors of that country, were determined to make these people give up reading the Bible, and worshipping God as they thought right. They wanted them to become Roman Catholics; so they made war on them, and burnt their houses, and shut many of them up in prisons and convents, and put others to cruel deaths.”

“That was a queer way to make them like the Roman-Catholic religion,” said Kit.

“It was a way which did not succeed very well,” said Amity. “The more these people were persecuted, the more closely they clung to their own religion, and the more they loved the Bible. But,

because they were liable at any time to lose their books, they used to do as you are doing. All the children were taught to commit to memory the whole of the Gospels. As they grew up they learned more and more, till many grown men and women could say the New Testament from beginning to end. They had very few books; and so the little children used to walk miles upon miles to their schools, over rocks and mountains, and ice and snow, through places which it made me giddy to look at, in order that they might learn the Bible."

"And are they persecuted now?" asked Kit.

"No: they have their liberty, and can read the gospel as much as they like. Now they are sending out missionaries to teach other people to read and love the Bible."

"That is nice," said Kit. "Miss Armstrong told us about the missionaries. I thought then I should like to be one; but I shall never know enough to be any thing if I can't go to school."

"Oh, you must not despair," said Ida. "I hope things will take a turn for the better some time. See here, I want you to look at this picture, and tell me if you ever saw any one like it."

Kit took the photograph Ida offered her, and regarded it long and earnestly.

"It looks very much like aunt Martha, only it is younger," said she. "I think she might have looked like that when she was a girl."

The girls exchanged glances again. "I suppose nobody sees your aunt," said Amity.

"Nobody ever comes to our house," replied Kit.

"Uncle Phin doesn't like to have them, because aunt Martha is afraid of strangers. At least, he says that is the reason; but I don't really think so," she added, after a moment's reflection.

"Why not?"

"Because she was not afraid on the cars, when we came here," said Kit: "she liked it. She used to look out of the window. And sometimes she would say quite sensible things. She did not have a single bad time all the way."

"How has she been since she lived here?" asked Amity.

"She has not been as well. She has grown thin, and coughs at night. Symantha thinks she has got the consumption."

"And about her mind?"

"Well, sometimes she is better, and then she is worse; but, on the whole, she is worse. She cries a great deal, and some days she will not eat at all. But I must be going," said Kit, looking at the sun.

"One thing more," said Amity. "Excuse me for asking so many questions, Kit; I have a reason for them. Are your uncle and Symantha kind to her?"

"I am afraid that is hardly a fair question, Amity," said Ida.

"Oh, yes, they are very kind to her," replied Kit. "Symantha is good to everybody, and uncle Phin would do any thing in the world for aunt Martha. I never heard him speak a hard word to her, even when she was the most troublesome. And even Melissa never dared to be cross to her when he was in the house. I don't think uncle Phin would be cross

to any one if he would let the beer alone. When we first came here, before he began to go to Oldbury, he was just as good as he could be. But I must go. It must be nearly five o'clock."

"Yes; we won't keep you any longer," said Ida. "That is an excellent idea of yours, about learning the Gospels by heart. Good-night, little one."

"I believe that aunt of hers is really Kathleen Joyce," said Amity as she and Ida turned homeward.

"So do I. And I believe, moreover, that she is the child's mother. I do wish aunt Barbara could see her; but I don't know what excuse she could make for forcing herself in, especially as we have no proof that the poor thing is ill-treated."

"Miss Celia says she screams dreadfully at times, and that the neighbors have talked of interfering," remarked Amity. "If they should, something might be done. At any rate, it will be a comfort to aunt Barbara to know that the poor thing is kindly treated."

As Kit came down the hill behind her uncle's house, she stopped and listened as the sound of wild and piercing screams, poured forth in quick succession, fell on her ear.

"Aunt Martha is bad again," she thought; and, quickening her steps, she reached the house, and entered her aunt's bedroom. The poor woman was sitting up in bed, uttering scream upon scream, and making frantic efforts to escape from her husband's arms, and throw herself on the floor; while he and Symantha strove in vain to soothe her.

"What *shall* we do?" said Phin, glancing at his

daughter with a look almost of despair. "She will hurt herself, and rouse the neighbors besides."

"Let *me* try," said Kit, unable to keep quiet any longer. An idea had darted into her head which she longed to put in practice.

"Well, do," said Symantha. "You can't do any harm. She is as bad as she can be, now."

Kit seated herself on the side of the bed, and, without a word of what she was about to do, she began singing, —

"Jesus, lover of my soul,"

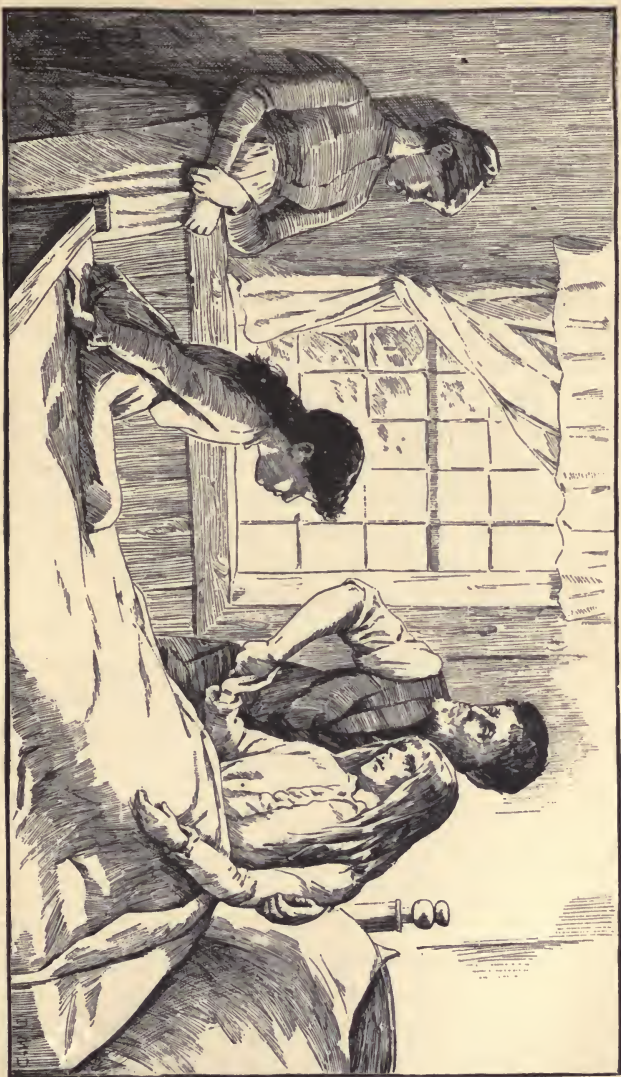
to the tender, pleading music of the Spanish Hymn.

The poor woman's screams and struggles ceased at once. She leaned back on her husband's breast, and listened like one entranced till Kit sang the hymn all through.

"I used to sing that," said she when Kit was silent. "I used to sing a great many hymns before they took away my Lord. But they have taken Him away, they have taken Him away; and I know not where they have laid Him."

"Oh, no, aunt Martha!" said Kit cheerfully. "They haven't taken Him away: nobody could do that. You know Mary thought they had, but she was mistaken. He had risen from the dead, and was close by her all the time, only it was so dark she couldn't see to tell who it was. But when He spoke to her, then she knew Him."

"But He won't speak to me," said the invalid. "He never speaks to me now. Do you think He ever will?"



"Yes, I know He will. I am going to read you what He says." And forgetting every thing in her desire to comfort the sufferer, forgetting even her fears for her chiefest treasure, Kit took her precious Testament from her pocket; and, opening it at random, she began to read from the third chapter of St. John. Mrs. Mallory listened with evident pleasure. Presently, however, her eyelids began to droop, her fingers ceased to pick at the bed-clothes, her head sank back. She had fallen into a quiet slumber. Phin gently laid her head on the pillow, while Symantha darkened the window. Presently he went to the door, and beckoned out Kit, who was still reading in subdued tones. Kit obeyed, though she was terribly frightened when she thought of what she had done.

"But I don't care," she said. "I know it was right."

To her amazement, Phin lifted her in his arms, and kissed her.

"You are a good girl, Kit. You shall do as you like. You may go to school, and to meeting too, if you want to."

"O uncle Phin! do you mean it?"

"Yes, I mean it. There, child, don't strangle me," as Kit threw her arms round his neck in a vehement hug.

"And may I really go to meeting and to Sunday school?" asked Kit.

"I didn't say any thing about Sunday school. However, I don't care," said Phin. "Yes, you may go, though I don't see what pleasure you find in it."

"Go yourself, and you will find out," said Kit.

"See here! you are one of the folks, that, when you give them an inch, they take an ell. Go to meeting, if you like; but don't take to preaching, yourself. But see here, Kit; how did you dare get out that Testament? Wasn't you afraid I would burn it up, as I did the other one?"

"I didn't think any thing about myself, anyway," answered Kit: "I only thought of comforting aunt Martha. And, you see, it did comfort her. You won't burn it up, will you, uncle Phin?"

"No, child. Don't be afraid, I won't hurt your precious book. Where did you get it?"

"Miss Van Zandt gave it to me. I found a book she lost up on the hill, and took it to her; and then she gave me this one."

"All right," said Phin, apparently not caring to pursue the subject. "There, run out to the barn, and find my pipe; I have left it out there somewhere."

"Just to think that I can go to meeting!" said Kit to Symantha that night as she was helping her wash up the dishes. "It seems too good to be true. Ain't you glad, Symantha?"

"Yes, child, I am glad to have you take all the comfort you can," answered Symantha wearily. "There is none too much going in the world, anyway; and you have had less than your share."

"I have had more than you have," said Kit. "I wish I could do something for you."

"You do a great deal for me. I don't know how I should live without you; and yet, if I could get you

such a home as Selina Weston has, I would let you go."

"Selina is not contented, though," said Kit; "at least, I think not. And only fancy, Symantha, she does not like Miss Armstrong and Miss Van Zandt. She says they are patronizing, and feel above her."

"And you don't think they feel above you, I suppose?"

"I never thought any thing about it," answered Kit. "Of course they are above me. Just think how many things they know, and I am only an ignorant little girl. But I don't think that is all the trouble with Selina. She liked Miss Armstrong ever so much at first. It seemed as if she did not want to have her speak to any one else."

"Perhaps *that* is the trouble. If Selina has a jealous disposition, she will never be happy anywhere. There, go to bed, child. You have had a hard day."

"It has turned out good, so I don't care," said Kit. "I am so glad I thought of singing to aunt Martha!"

"Yes, it was a happy thought. What put it into your head?"

"I don't know, unless God did," answered Kit with an odd kind of matter-of-fact reverence. "But I am so glad I can go to school! I shall feel like dancing all the way."

But Kit did not go to school next morning, after all. Mrs. Mallory slept late, and the moment she waked she asked for the child.

"Was somebody singing to me? or did I dream it?" she asked of Symantha.

"You did not dream it," answered Symantha gently. "Kit was singing for you."

"And can she sing again?" asked the invalid imploringly. "Will she come and sing for me again? Won't your father let her?"

"Oh, yes! she shall sing for you again," said Phin, answering for himself. "Try what you can do," he said to Kit. "Perhaps you can coax her to eat something. She did not touch a bit yesterday."

Kit glanced at the clock in some dismay. It was almost school-time. "*He* would want me to stay with aunt Martha, I know," she thought, "and I believe Miss Armstrong would too." Without a moment's hesitation she sat down by her aunt, and began to sing again.

"Thank you, my dear," said Mrs. Mallory; "you have done me a great deal of good. But I feel very weak and faint."

"That is because you haven't eaten any thing," said Kit. "Let me give you your breakfast, and then I will read to you as I did yesterday. I will wash your face and hands, and then you will feel more like eating."

Mrs. Mallory submitted to all Kit's toilet offices without resistance, and even with some show of pleasure. As Kit tied on her cap, she held her hand for a moment.

"Who are you, little girl?" she said, gazing wistfully at her. "I seem to remember you."

"Why, yes, aunt Martha: I am Kit. Don't you know Kit?"

"I don't think that is what I used to call you,"

said the poor woman, "but my mind is a good deal confused. I don't think I understand any thing very well."

"That is because you are sick and weak," answered Kit with ready tact. "When you are better you will know all about it. See, here comes Symantha with the nice breakfast."

Mrs. Mallory ate with some appearance of appetite. "Now sing to me if you are not tired," said she.

"Oh, I am not tired," answered Kit. "I love to sing." She sang two or three hymns, and then read till Mrs. Mallory fell asleep again.

"She is asleep," Kit reported, stealing out of the room. "And, Symantha, you don't know how sensibly she talked."

"What did she say?" asked Symantha.

"Oh, not much; only she asked me if I thought any one could be saved who had denied their Lord. And I told her yes, and read her what it says about Peter. Then she tried to remember a verse; and I found it, and read it to her. It was about the blood of Christ cleansing us from all sin, you know."

"Well?"

"Then she asked if I knew a hymn about that; and I told her I did, and sung it for her. Then she whispered to herself a little while. I think she was praying," said Kit with a look and tone of awe. "And finally she went to sleep."

"That does seem as if she were getting better," said Phin. "Kit, if she does, there is nothing I won't do for you."

Symantha shook her head sadly. "Her mind may get better, but her body won't," said she. "Can't you see how it is, father?"

"You think it is the lighting-up for death?"

"I think so," said Symantha; "and I don't know that we ought to wish it otherwise, if she dies happy."

Phin sighed deeply. "Well, no, I suppose not; but this world will be an empty place when she is gone. Symantha, I haven't been a good father to you, I haven't been good at any thing that I know of; but I do thank you for your kindness and patience with that poor thing."

"Then, if I have done any thing for her, do something for me," said Symantha: "stay away from Oldbury, and let the drink alone."

Phin shook his head, but he said no more; nor did Symantha pursue the subject any further.

CHAPTER XIV.

MISS VAN ZANDT.

GREAT was the amazement of all the school-girls to see Kit, neatly dressed, and book in hand, walk into the schoolhouse Friday evening, and seat herself among the children.

"There is Kit," whispered Ruth to Selina. "I wonder if she has run away."

"I dare say she has. I know she said her uncle would not let her come."

"Well, for my part, I believe in children doing as they are told, about going to meeting or any thing else. I wonder why she has not been in school."

"Her aunt is worse," replied Selina. "Dr. Chase went up to see her this morning. He told father she was in the last stage of consumption."

Never had the Friday-evening services in the red-schoolhouse district been so well attended as they were this summer. Perhaps this increased attendance might be partly owing to the fact that the red schoolhouse had never before been so comfortable. Certainly it was much more agreeable to spend an hour in a clean, well-aired, cool room, fresh and

fragrant with the smell of flowers and green leaves, than to pass the same time in a hot, fusty apartment, unventilated since the afternoon school session, with air heavy enough to have put hundred-eyed Argus asleep. Miss Van Zandt's singing might also be an attraction. But I am inclined to think there was more in the case than either, and that a gracious influence was stirring the air, not only in the red-schoolhouse district, but in the whole parish of Oldham.

Kit had counted on a word with Miss Armstrong either before or after the meeting, but neither she nor Mrs. Van Zandt was present. Mr. Bassett opened the service, as usual, with a hymn: and some of the elder people smiled at the earnestness with which the children joined in the singing; and more than one turned to look at Kit, whose voice sounded out beautifully clear and full of expression.

"Did you ever!" whispered Ruth. "Who ever would have guessed that poor child had such a voice?"

Selina did not answer, but her face wore any thing but a pleased expression. The service went on as usual, except that more people spoke, and almost every one of the children had a text, or a verse from some favorite hymn. Miss Celia made a few remarks, in her silvery, tremulous voice. They were very simple. She said she had been young, and now was old; she had passed through many severe trials, some of which were well known to her friends, and others only to her heavenly Father: but she wished to say that in all of them she had been helped and

comforted by Divine Love. It was a support which had never failed her. She had enjoyed it all her life, and she hoped the dear children and young people present might be as happy in this respect as she had been.

That was all she said. It was commonplace enough, if such a subject can ever be commonplace; but it was spoken with an expression of inward conviction which sent it home to almost every heart present.

"Are there any more remarks?" asked Mr. Bassett. There was a short silence; and then a clear little voice sounded from the low bench in front, where the little children sat:—

"Please, Mr. Bassett, will you ask the people to pray for aunt Martha, because she is very sick, and the doctor says she won't live but a little while."

Everybody looked round in surprise. Kit had risen to her feet in her earnestness, and stood with her shining eyes fixed on the good miller's face, while the carnation color mantled beautifully in her cheeks. More than one mother felt the tears very near her eyes as they rested on the poor little motherless child, who stood so evidently thinking of nothing but the request she had made; and more than one prayer went up then and there on her behalf and that of the invalid.

There was the usual little pause for neighborly chat when the service was over.

"Why, Kit! how did you come here?" asked Sarah.

"Uncle Phin let me come," answered Kit. "And

only think, Sarah, he says I may go to Sunday school!"

"How glad I am!" said Sarah, bending to kiss the face turned to her. "But where have you been these two days?"

"I could not leave aunt Martha. She is very sick, and she likes to have me sing and read to her."

"Is she sensible?"

"Yes, almost all the time now, though she isn't quite right. She thinks I am her daughter, and she can't bear to have me away from her when she is awake; but she isn't unhappy, as she used to be, and she prays a great deal. But, Sarah, I wonder where Miss Armstrong is. I thought I should see her this evening."

"I don't know, I am sure. Let us ask Selina. — Selina, where is Miss Armstrong?"

"She has gone to New York with Mrs. Van Zandt. They had a telegram that some friend of theirs is very low, — not expected to live. Miss Armstrong thought she could not go at first; but Miss Van Zandt must needs offer to teach the school while she was away, so she got ready, and started off in Mrs. Van Zandt's carriage to catch the train at Oldbury."

"I don't see why you should speak so scornfully, Selina," said Faith. "For my part, I think it is very kind of Miss Van Zandt."

"Well, I don't want to be going to school to a girl only two or three years older than I am."

"What difference does her age make, so long as she knows more than we do?" asked Faith very

sensibly. Selina made no reply. "I'll tell you what it is, Selina, you will end by hating Miss Van Zandt, if you don't mind," continued Faith earnestly. "I don't see how you can feel so. What harm has she ever done to you?"

"I never said she had done me any harm," returned Selina. "I think she puts herself forward, and makes herself ridiculous by taking so much on herself; but, as to hating, I never troubled myself enough about her to do that." And yet Selina did hate Ida, and she knew it.

"Where is Patience to-night, Faith?" asked Mrs. Weston.

"She isn't very well, and she had so much to do she thought she couldn't come. I wanted her to let me do up the work, but she wouldn't."

"That is a pity," said Mrs. Weston. "It would have done her good. — Come, Selina; we must be going."

The children were early at the schoolhouse next morning, eager to see their new teacher, whom they were all prepared to like.

"Who do you think came to Bible class with me last night?" said Agnes as she joined the group of older girls. "No less a person than Milly Richmond."

"Milly Richmond!" exclaimed Selina. "I don't believe it. She laughs at the very idea."

"She came, for all that. We sat close by the door, and went away the very first minute we could."

"But how did it happen?"

"Well, I asked her. You see, Milly and I have

never been very good friends," said Agnes with some embarrassment; "and I think perhaps I have been hard upon her, so I have been trying to make up. I did not believe she would come to the service: but I remembered what Dr. Madison said about charity at home, and I thought there would be no harm in trying; so I asked her, as I said, and she asked me if I really meant it. 'Of course,' I said; and then she said, well, she did not mind for once, only she would like to sit by the door, because it was so warm."

"How did she like it?" asked Sarah.

"I asked her, and she said she didn't know, herself; she should have to think about it. And after that she never said another word all the way home."

"Is it true, Agnes, that you are going to be confirmed next time the Bishop comes?" asked Faith.

"Quite true," answered Agnes.

"I should think you were pretty young to take such a step," remarked Ruth. "Why don't you wait till you are older?"

"Why should I?" asked Agnes. "I am fifteen, and I don't think I shall know my own mind any better if I wait till I am twenty or forty."

"Perhaps you would not know it as well," observed Sarah.

"If you think it so nice in Agnes, why don't you come forward yourself?" asked Selina with something of a sneer,—an expression which was becoming so habitual to her that it threatened to spoil her pretty face.

"I mean to," said Sarah briefly. She paused a

moment, and then added with an evident effort, "And, girls, I want to say something: I want to ask your pardon, and especially yours, Selina, for all the sharp and hateful things I have said. I know that is my besetting sin, as Mr. Bassett said last night, and I am going to try and do better; so I hope you will all forgive me."

The girls looked at each other in amazement. Sarah was a very proud girl, and such an acknowledgment had a double force coming from her.

"I am sure I do, if there is any thing to forgive, though I never laid up any thing against you," said Faith. "You are so nice in other ways, that I never minded your sharp speeches."

"And you, Selina?"

"Oh, I forgive you, of course, since you ask me, though I do think you have treated me shamefully," said Selina coldly. "I only hope your goodness will last, that's all." And Selina turned and went into the schoolhouse.

"That's a queer kind of forgiveness," said Faith. "I think Selina is queer, anyhow."

"Oh, well, never mind," said Sarah. "I have been aggravating to her, I know. Here comes Miss Van Zandt. Doesn't she look pretty in her brown-linen dress and blue ribbons? We must do all we can to help her, girls. I don't suppose she has ever taught before."

But those of the school—they were very few—who were inclined to take liberties with their young teacher soon found that they had reckoned without their host. Miss Van Zandt had a ready wit and

a quick eye, besides a fund of imperturbable good-nature. In the geography class she delighted the girls by her descriptions of places she had seen in England, and promised next day to bring some photographs of cathedrals and of natural scenery.

"Of what place were we just speaking?" asked Ida, turning to Selina, who was making an elaborate display of taking no interest in the lesson.

"I don't know," replied Selina: "I was not listening."

"Next," said Miss Van Zandt.

"York," was the instant answer; and to Selina's infinite disgust, and the amusement of the other girls, Ruth Jewsbury went above her.

"I don't think that is fair, Miss Van Zandt," said Selina. "I knew the answer."

"I dare say you did; but you said, yourself, you were not paying attention. Next: For what is Newcastle noted?" And that was all Selina gained by her manœuvre. When noon-time came, Ida requested the elder girls to remain for a few minutes.

"I have a few words to say to you, young ladies," said she. "As you know, I have taken the place of my friend Miss Armstrong for a little time, in order that the school may not be closed while she is away. I have not much experience, at least in a day-school; and it is very likely that I may make some mistakes. What I have to ask is, that you older girls, who are the leaders in the school, will help me by throwing your influence upon the side of law and order. Little girls are apt to follow the lead of large girls; and, if the children see you desirous to maintain the char-

acter of the school during your teacher's absence, they will do the same. Not that I have any thing to complain of," she hastened to add: "on the contrary, you have all been very kind to me."

"I don't see how we could be any thing else," said Sarah. "I don't think you will have any trouble with the children, Miss Van Zandt: they are good little things."

"I don't believe I shall have any trouble with anybody," said Miss Van Zandt. "Does any one know where Kitty is?"

"I suppose she is at home," answered Sarah. "Her aunt is very sick. Dr. Chase says she can only live a few days. And she has taken such a fancy to Kit, she cannot bear her out of sight. She thinks Kit is her daughter."

"Poor woman!" said Miss Van Zandt. "Well, girls, I don't know that I have any more to say, and I am keeping you from your dinners. I hope and believe that we shall have a very pleasant report to make to Miss Armstrong when she comes home."

"How long will she be gone?" asked Faith.

"The time is uncertain, because it depends upon her friend's health,—probably not more than ten days, possibly two weeks."

"And are you going to teach the school all that time?" asked Selina with an emphasis on the "you."

"I fully intend to do so at present," answered Miss Van Zandt, not in the least ruffled. "Why do you ask?"

"Oh, nothing; only, if Miss Armstrong is going to be away so long, I should suppose the trustees would

engage some grown-up person to take charge of the school."

The girls looked at each other in indignant amazement as Selina gave vent to this piece of impertinence, but Miss Van Zandt only smiled.

"How much taller would you like me to be?" she asked, erecting her beautiful figure to its full height. "If the trustees get any one much more grown up, they will have to raise the roof or lower the floor. Pray, how old are you, Selina?"

"She is fifteen," said Agnes, as Selina did not answer.

"Exactly, and I am nineteen. You seem to feel tolerably grown up, yourself, I think; and so you see I have a right to feel four years more grown up than you are."

"Please, Mith Dan Want, ma says will 'oo tome to dinner, because ith's all weady," said a small child, inserting a curly black head into a crack in the door.

"Thank you, my dear; but who is ma?" asked Ida.

"It is Emma Bassett," said Faith. "What a shame of me! Mrs. Bassett called me this morning, and told me to be sure to tell Miss Van Zandt to come to dinner; and I forgot it."

"Well, ith's all weady," said the curly head; "and there's chewy-pie."

"Indeed! Then I must certainly come, and some of you must eat the lunch Aggy put up for me. There are some nice bananas in the basket, girls, if you like them."

"Well, Selina, I do hope you feel better," said

Ruth Jewsbury. "You have made a nice figure of yourself, I must say. I should think you would be ashamed."

Selina was surprised and vexed; for Ruth had hitherto been somewhat rebellious to Miss Armstrong, and she had looked to her for support in her attempt to put down Miss Van Zandt.

"She didn't make much by it, anyway," said Faith, "only to turn the laugh on herself."

"Selina, what does make you act so?" asked Agnes seriously. "I should think you might be pleased at having such a pleasant young lady for a teacher, instead of some one like — Miss Priscilla Davis, for instance."

"Dear me! what did I do?" asked Selina. "One would think I had murdered some one, at the very least."

"You tried to insult Miss Van Zandt, and only succeeded in making yourself ridiculous, — that's what you did. — Didn't she, girls?"

"That was what it came to," answered Agnes, "but I don't think she will make much by it. — Come, Selina; do think better of it. I don't see why we should not have a very good time with Miss Van Zandt, if we all turn to and support her. I am sure nothing could be nicer than her ways this morning. And how interesting she made the geography class!"

"Oh, yes, of course. It is all Miss Van Zandt now, and dear Miss Armstrong is nobody and nowhere," said Selina. "Last week you thought there was nobody like Miss Armstrong."

"And I think so now," returned Agnes. "I have

a right to, for she is the best friend I ever had, except my mother. I never could pay her for what she has done for me, if I were to live a hundred years. But I think the best way I can show my love for her in her absence is to respect and help her friend who has taken her place."

"Agnes talks like a book, and she is right," said Ruth. "I never was so wonderfully fond of Miss Armstrong as some of you,—as Selina was when she first came, for instance,—but I think she is an excellent teacher; and, as for Miss Van Zandt, I think she is lovely."

"Yes, because she let you go up in the geography class,—a thing you never did before," retorted Selina. "Oh, well, I don't propose to have any words about it," she added loftily. "You can all flatter and bow down to Miss Van Zandt as much as you please, for all me. I shall not, that's all."

And certainly Selina kept her word by doing all in her power to make Ida's work as disagreeable as possible. Ida tried the effect of a gentle remonstrance, but it did no good. Selina denied having done any thing wrong; and, when one instance after another of disrespect and disobedience was brought home to her, she burst into tears, declared that every one was against her because she was an orphan, and because she would not pretend to be religious. She was in every one's way, nobody loved her, and she wished she was dead.

Much perplexed, Ida sought a private interview with Mrs. Weston, and laid the case before her.

"I don't think I have been unjust to Selina," said

she. "She is the only one I have any trouble with ; but, really, she is so disrespectful that I do not know what to do with her."

"I can understand it," said Mrs. Weston, sighing. "Selina is very trying when she takes one of her perverse fits, and I hardly know how to manage her myself. It is not fair, however, that you should be troubled with her ; and I think I will keep her at home for the present."

"That seems a pity," remarked Ida. "Perhaps if you were to talk to her" —

"I fear that would do no good ; she seems only to resent it. But I will consult her father, and see what he thinks it best to do."

The result of the consultation was, that Selina found herself taken out of school, and set to work about the house and dairy. The change was not at all to her taste ; but she was too proud to complain, and took great pains to show that she did not care.

CHAPTER XV.

MORE CHANGES.

KIT had not been able to attend the school regularly since it had been under Ida's administration, though she had managed to slip away two or three times for an afternoon. Mrs. Mallory was failing rapidly. Dr. Chase came to see her, and told her friends there was nothing to be done.

"She may last six weeks, or she may drop away at any moment," said he, in answer to a question from Phin. "Get her to take nourishing food and the tonic I have left her, and keep her as quiet as possible. I should not be surprised if her mind should clear at the last. I am glad to see her so well taken care of."

"She has had all I could give her," said Phin. "I don't amount to much, but I have tried to be good to her."

"It is easy to see that, by the way she confides in you," replied the doctor kindly. "But I don't see, Mr. Mallory, why you should not amount to as much as any one in the county. Why not?"

"Too late," said Phin. "When a man has sold himself to the devil, he can't break the bargain."

"Perhaps not ; but there is One who can, and who will if you turn to Him."

Phin shook his head. "I don't know," said he ; "sometimes I think so, but — Well, there ! we won't talk about it. It is too late for me, anyhow ; but I'd like to think there was a good time ahead for that poor thing in there."

"I believe there is, as surely as I believe in my own existence," said the doctor.

"Well, I hope so. You will call again, doctor ?"

"I will if you wish it ; but I tell you frankly, I can do nothing for her."

It was a solemn, but, on the whole, not an unhappy time for Kit. Phin staid at home, not drinking at all, but attending to his farm-work, and taking care of his wife. As Kit said, he was always good-natured when he did not drink. Kit helped Symantha with the work, waited on Mrs. Mallory, and, when she had a little time, studied her school-lessons, and read in her Testament, which she now produced without fear in her uncle's presence. Phin did not even laugh at her ; and when Melissa, who came home for a Sunday, began her old fashion of teasing, she was promptly silenced by her father.

"Let the child alone. She is doing the work you ought to be about, by rights ; and she shall read what she pleases. Perhaps it would be all the better for you if you read something of the same kind, instead of the stuff you do."

"Dear me, how good we are, all at once !" said Melissa, with a toss of her head ; but she did not venture any further, knowing, that, if she came to an out-

and-out contest with her father, she was sure to get the worst of it. She took her departure on Monday, unregretted by any one. Mrs. Mallory was afraid of her, and she and Symantha were never comfortable together. The next week a letter was received from her, saying that she was going to a place in New York; and that was the last that was heard of her for many a long day.

Mrs. Mallory failed every day; and, as so often happens in such cases, as her body decayed, her mind grew clear and calm. The old despairing wail was never heard now. Kit had learned to watch and anticipate her moods, and, as soon as she saw the cloud coming, she would begin to sing, or read in the Testament; and the remedy was always successful. After a while Kit ventured to ask the meaning of things which she did not understand, and was surprised at the clearness of the explanations she received.

"I do think aunt Martha is as sensible as anybody now," Kit said one day to Symantha. "You don't know how nicely she explained my Sunday-school lesson to me. But, Symantha, she seems to think I am her little girl; and she wants me to call her 'mother.' Isn't it funny? Did she ever have a little girl?"

"Yes, she had a child who would have been about your age," answered Symantha, bending over her work. "Call her 'mother' if it pleases her. It won't do any hurt."

"I do," said Kit. "But isn't it queer that she should be crazy about that, when she seems all right about every thing else?"

"Not at all," replied Symantha: "people often are that way. I read of a man who thought he was a glass bottle, though he was straight enough about every other subject. He was always afraid people were going to break him. Isn't this the day for your singing-class?"

"Yes; but I didn't know whether you could spare me."

"Oh, yes, I will manage. I will tell ma you have gone to learn some new hymns for her. Put on your other frock, and run along while she is asleep; and you will have a little time in school."

Kit had carried her point about going to Sunday school, and a very happy though very shy little girl it was who presented herself at the church door the first Sunday morning in August. For the church repairs were quite finished now. The painting was done, the belfry made secure, the aisles carpeted, and the weedy, brambly graveyard reduced to such order and neatness, that, as Edward Kettle said, it wouldn't know itself. The ladies regarded the result of their work with great satisfaction, and Mr. Blandy remarked with great complacency that *we* had made a good piece of work of it.

"Whose class would you like to be in, Kitty?" asked Mr. Bassett, the superintendent.

"I don't care," answered Kit; "only I think I had better go with the little ones, because I don't know any thing hardly."

"I think I shall put you in my wife's class," said the superintendent; and Kit was quite content, for, like every child that came near her, she dearly loved "Ma Bassett."

"Well, how did Kit get on?" asked Mr. Bassett of his wife after school.

"Nicely," answered Mrs. Bassett; "no child could behave better. And as to her not knowing any thing, she has more Scripture in her head, and her heart too, than half the grown people in town. It is wonderful to see such a growth of grace in a child who has had so little teaching."

"Grace is not dependent on human means, happily," remarked her husband. "Did she say any thing about her aunt?"

"Only that she is failing. Dr. Chase says she cannot live many days. He says, too, what I was glad to hear, that they are very kind to the poor thing, and that it is easy to see, by the way she depends upon her husband, that he is habitually good to her."

"Well, I am sorry for Phin Mallory," observed Mr. Bassett. "I don't think we have treated him quite right, either. After all, nobody really knows any harm of him, so far as his conduct goes, except that he drinks now and then. Can't you make an errand up there, ma? Perhaps you might get a chance to talk to him."

"I can try, at any rate. If he is so fond of his wife, he won't be likely to insult any one who comes to do her a kindness."

Accordingly, next day Mrs. Bassett presented herself at Phin Mallory's door with a little basket of ripe apricots, the first of the season, and some other dainties, for the invalid. But she could not flatter herself that her visit had any very particular result. She did not see Symantha, who was lying down

with a headache. Phin took her into his wife's room, and she exchanged a few words with the invalid, who was much pleased with the prettily decorated basket of fruit, and made her acknowledgments in a way which showed her to be a cultivated, well-bred woman. Mrs. Bassett's womanly eye remarked with pleasure the delicate neatness of every thing about the sick woman, and the gentleness of her husband's manner toward her; but Mrs. Mallory was so weak that she did not venture to prolong her visit.

"Good-by, Mrs. Mallory. I hope you will let us know if we can do any thing for you."

"Thank you," answered Mrs. Mallory, "but I have the best of care; and it is an unspeakable comfort to have my little girl with me again."

"Whom does she mean by her little girl?" asked Mrs. Bassett when they had left the room.

"She means Kit," answered Phin. "She thinks Kit is her daughter; and we let her think so, since she takes comfort in it. There isn't much use in arguing with crazy people."

"Not a bit of use," agreed Mrs. Bassett. "Kit is a dear child. I am so glad you let her come to Sunday school! Miss Celia Claxton was saying Sunday, she remembered your sister Chloe coming to church and Sunday school when she was just about Kit's age."

"Yes, Chloe was a good girl: she took after my mother. But she died young."

"So Celia was saying. She was telling me how happy she was in her last sickness and death. It is a blessed thing, Mr. Mallory, to have one's dying pillow smoothed by such a hope."

"Well, perhaps it is," replied Phin, with some thing of a sigh. "But what if it turns out all a delusion, and there should be no such thing as heaven and the rest of it, after all?"

"Well, what if it does?" answered Mrs. Bassett with spirit. "Then I shall be just as well off as you are, and there won't be much danger of your laughing at me, as somebody says. But if I am right, and you are wrong, you will be making rather an awful mistake, Mr. Mallory."

"There is something in that," admitted Phin. "Anyhow, I am willing folks should take all the comfort they can."

"But won't you think about it yourself, Mr. Mallory? Won't you come to our Friday-evening meeting?"

"Well, no, I guess not. Folks wouldn't want me there."

"You are very much mistaken," answered Mrs. Bassett eagerly. "We should all be very glad to see you. Only come, and see if you don't have a welcome."

"I will see about it. Well, Mrs. Bassett, I am very much obliged to you for coming to see my wife, and for your kindness to Kit. You and your husband live up to what you profess, anyhow; and that is more than most folks do, even according to their own showing. I heard two church-members talking in Oldbury the last time I was there, and it was all about the worldliness of the churches, and how little they were doing."

"They might have been better employed."

"I thought so myself. It was a little too much like the ill bird that spoils its own nest. I'd stick up for my own side, anyhow."

"Well, Mr. Mallory, if you need help any time, I hope you won't hesitate to ask for it. Celia and Delia Claxton told me to say that they would come and sit up any night."

"Much obliged, but I take care of my wife myself nights. — Old cats! they just want to satisfy their curiosity, and find something to talk about," muttered Phin to himself as he returned to his wife's room. "And yet I won't say that, either. It was kind of them to offer, anyhow."

But Mrs. Mallory was soon to be beyond the need of earthly aid. That night she seemed better and brighter than usual. She talked to Kit about her Sunday-school lesson, and heard her read and sing, as usual. After Kit had gone to bed, Mrs. Mallory called her husband, and had a long private conversation with him, — so long that Symantha became uneasy, and went to the door.

"I am afraid ma is talking too much," said she.

"I have done now," said the invalid, smiling sweetly as Symantha kissed her. "I shall not talk much more. Good-by, Symantha. You have been a kind friend to me; and I have tried you sadly, I know. Be kind to my child, as you have been to me. Will you promise me that?" she asked, holding Symantha's hand, and looking wistfully at her.

"Yes, ma, I promise you I will always be kind to Kit as long as it is in my power. Now lie down and go to sleep."

Phin remained with his wife, as usual, through the night. The sky was just growing bright with the approaching sunrise when he opened Symantha's door.

"Come quick!" said he.

Symantha lost not a moment. She called Kit, and hastened to the bedside. Mrs. Mallory seemed to be still sleeping, but her face showed the approach of the shadow that never falls but once. Kit saw the change, and was awe-struck.

"Is she worse?" she whispered, taking hold of Symantha's hand.

"Speak to her, Kit. Call her mother," said Phin hoarsely.

"Don't you feel so well, mother? Shall I get you something? Dear mother, speak to your own Kitty."

The blue eyes were opened, and lighted up for a moment with unearthly brilliancy. "Dear child, hold fast to your Father in heaven. Never let go — never" — Her voice faltered.

"Don't you know me, Matey?" asked Phin, bending over her. The eyes rested on him with a look of unutterable tenderness, but the power of speech was gone. There was a sweet smile, a long, soft sigh; and all was over. The tired and troubled spirit had found rest.

Mrs. Bassett and the two Claxton sisters came with offers of neighborly assistance, which were accepted by Symantha; and the last offices were kindly and tenderly performed by their friendly hands, as is the beautiful custom of the country. Long may it continue!

When the old ladies returned to their home, they found Aunt Betsy sitting on the front steps.

"So you have come at last," said she. "Here I've been a-waiting and a-waiting as much as half an hour. Seems to me it is pretty early for folks to be going a-visiting."

"I think as much, Aunt Betsy. What brought you here before eight o'clock in the morning?" returned Miss Delia.

"I came to borrow some ginger and some molasses," snapped Aunt Betsy. "And I expect I've got my death of cold waiting for you. Where have you been?"

"Oh, we have been out on business," answered Miss Delia, calmly proceeding to kindle her fire. "Now we are going to have some breakfast if we can get a chance. — Celia, will you have tea, or coffee?"

"Just as you like," said Miss Celia, who never had any choice in household matters. Delia used to say it would never do for her to go away for a whole week, since Celia would starve because she could not make up her mind what to cook.

"Where *have* you been, anyway?" demanded Aunt Betsy in a tone of exasperation.

"We have been up to Phin Mallory's, helping to lay out his wife," answered Miss Celia. "The poor thing died at sunrise, and Symantha sent Kitty down for us."

"Do tell! Was she alone?"

"No: her father was there."

"Do tell! Well, and how did you find things? Folks say they kept the poor thing tied down to her

bedstead and half starved, and beat her to make her quiet."

"Folks say more than there is any call for," answered Miss Delia. "It is easy to see that poor Mrs. Mallory has been well done for. Her bed, and every thing about her, was as neat as wax. Besides, Dr. Chase has been to see her several times, and he told me himself that it was plain she was well treated."

"Well, I don't know. Folks are very deceitful," said Aunt Betsy, evidently disappointed. "I don't believe she would have screamed so if she hadn't been abused. And when is the funeral to be?"

"On Friday, I believe."

"That's awful quick, seems to me."

"Two days, and you know it is very hot weather."

"And where will she be buried?"

"Here, I presume."

"Are any of her own folks coming to the funeral?"

"I'm sure I don't know. It is no business of mine," answered Miss Delia, whose patience, never her strongest point, began to grow threadbare. "Celia, do come and get your breakfast. You will be fainting away. — There is your ginger, Aunt Betsy; but we haven't any molasses, and sha'n't have till I get a chance to send down to the store. I suppose you have had your breakfast, of course, long before this time. Good-morning."

"Mean, stingy old maid!" said Aunt Betsy as she went away with her ginger.

"You might have asked her to breakfast," said Miss Celia, coming from the pantry. "Why didn't you?"

“Because I wanted you to have your breakfast in peace. You are like a cat without claws, Celia. It is well you have me to do a little scratching for you now and then.”

CHAPTER XVI.

THE TEA-PARTY.

Two days after her death Mrs. Mallory's body was laid in the old churchyard beside the grave of her husband's young sister. Mr. Brace, the new minister, officiated ; and a great many people came to the funeral. Phin was deeply affected, and broke down entirely at the grave.

"Won't you come into my house, and rest a little before you go home, Mr. Mallory?" said kind Mrs. Andrews, who lived close by the church.

"Yes, do ; you and the girls," added Mr. Andrews.

"You are very kind, but I think pa will be best at home," said Symantha. "He is quite worn out with watching."

"Well, if we can do any thing for you, you must let us know," said Mr. Andrews as he shook hands with Phin.

"And just let me say one word to you, Phineas," said old Mrs. Bassett. "I knew your mother and your grandmother, so you will excuse an old woman's freedom. Don't go to seeking comfort in drink. There may be forgetfulness in it, but there is no

peace; and it will only leave you worse than you were before. Don't go looking for comfort in the world, my son; but turn to your wife's God and your mother's God. He has stricken, and He can bind up. Don't touch the drink, whatever you do."

"I won't," said Phin, pressing her hand; and at the time he meant what he said. For at least a month he staid quietly at home, working diligently on his farm, mending the fences, and repairing the house and barns. He even went twice to the Friday-evening service, at Kit's entreaty, and joined his splendid bass voice to the singing. Symantha's face began once more to lose its expression of care and apprehension; and, as to Kit, she was never so happy in her life. She went to school every day, and to church and Sunday school on Sunday. Melissa, hitherto the greatest disturber of her peace, was out of the way; and uncle Phin was always kind nowadays, and let her read her Bible and sing her hymns as much as she liked. Her mind expanded every day, and she was one of those happy people to whom the acquisition of knowledge is a keen delight for its own sake. All the girls liked her; and even Aunt Betsy allowed that "that Mallory young one" behaved very well when she was in sight, but made herself amends by adding, "But she'll show out what is in her yet, you may depend upon it. What's bred in the bone stays long in the flesh."

"Very true," said Miss Delia, to whom the remark was addressed. "We've all got total depravity bred in our bones, Aunt Betsy; and I, for one, haven't got rid of it yet, altogether."

"And there's Phin Mallory coming to the meetings," pursued Aunt Betsy. "We shall have all the riffraff in town coming in next."

"I am sure I wish we could," remarked Mr. Brace, the new minister. "I, for one, should enjoy the sight, as our Lord did when the publicans and sinners came together to hear Him. What is the Church for, Mrs. Burr, if not to gather in just such people as those you call riffraff?"

"I think, sometimes, the Church doesn't do as much of that sort of work as it might," said Miss Delia.

"Of course not. The Church does not do as much work of any sort as it might. Nevertheless it does most of the work that is done in that line. Who sustains all the city missions and charities, all the mission Sunday schools in low city districts and far-away Western towns, all the frontier missionaries and those in foreign parts, if not the Church? You talk about riffraff, Mrs. Burr: I should like to take you to New York, and show you the lady visitors going fearlessly into neighborhoods where even the policeman looks carefully to his revolver before he ventures. I should like to take you into one tenement-house I know of, where I found a district nurse, a well-educated lady, making a fire in a cracked stove, and cleaning floor and windows with her own hands, because no ordinary charwoman would venture into the place. Who does all these things but the Church in some of its branches, — that Church which is the blessed company of all faithful people? The Church does not accomplish half, no, not a tenth, of what it

might if every member thereof were faithful in his and her vocation and ministry ; but the world would be badly off without it."

Mr. Brace spoke with a good deal of earnestness, possibly with some little heat, as people are apt to do when they feel warmly ; and Aunt Betsy was confirmed in her opinion that he had no proper ministerial dignity, and would never fill Dr. Munson's pulpit.

Phin staid at home, as I have said, for nearly a month. Then he felt himself obliged to go to Oldbury with a load of hay.

"Why don't you sell your hay in Oldfield?" asked Symantha.

"Because I promised it to Stannard at the tavern, and I don't want to break my word. Don't you be scared, my girl : I'm not going to make a fool of myself any more. I've turned over a new leaf about that. Keep up a good heart, and I'll bring you and Kitty each a new frock if I have good luck with my hay."

"I want a piece of cotton sheeting, more than a new frock. Kit needs a dress or two, but I thought I should get them just as well at Mr. Andrews's : he has some nice black-and-white checks. Anyhow, father, do keep away from Stillwell's."

"I'm not going near Stillwell's," said Phin rather angrily. "I believe you think your father is a fool." Then, softening as he saw his daughter's evident distress, "Don't you borrow trouble. I don't much wonder at your doing it, all things considered ; but you'll see I'll come home all right. I'm no such tow-string of a man as you think me."

But alas! what man is not a tow-string when assailed by old appetites and old temptations, and old companions ready to do the Devil's work, and take the Devil's wages? Phin came home silent and morose. He brought no new frocks for anybody; and when Symantha asked him, next day, for money to make some needful purchases at the Corners, he replied shortly that he had none.

"I thought you sold your hay," said Symantha. "Didn't Stannard pay you?"

"No — yes, partly; but I had to use the money another way. Take some of the butter-money, or get Andrews to trust you: I'll make it all right with him."

"I thought we agreed to save the butter-money for ma's grave-stone," said Symantha.

"I can't help it," answered Phin, turning suddenly away. "I'd give you the money if I had it; but I haven't, and there's no use talking."

Symantha sighed, but said no more. In a few days Phin went to Oldbury again, and came home so drunk that Symantha and Kit had to take care of the team. His visits became more and more frequent, often lasting two or three days at a time. He brought home another keg of beer, and from that time was hardly ever sober. He began to talk of selling the farm and going West again, and Symantha was in despair.

"I did think we were settled at last," said she. "I thought I was to have a home."

"Well, have a home. Who hinders you?" said her father roughly. "You and Kit can hire a room somewhere, and take care of yourselves."

"You know I won't do that, father. I shall never leave you."

"Maybe I shall leave you," said Phin. "It don't follow, because I am going to destruction, that I need drag you after me. — Well, there, you needn't cry, Kit: I haven't gone yet."

"I can't help crying when you talk so," sobbed Kit. "O uncle Phin! do be good. You have been so nice lately, and gone to church, and all. I did think you were going to turn out a Christian."

"I almost thought so, myself, Kitty; but it's no go," said Phin, with a hard laugh. "You see, I'm one of those stony-ground hearers that you read about the other day, and nothing good will grow in me. But you and your friends believe in prayer: why don't you pray for me!"

"I do," replied Kit with emphasis, "every day and every night; and I am going to keep on. You don't believe in God, uncle Phin; but you can't get away from Him, not in Oldbury nor anywhere else."

Kit kept her word; and her prayers were heard, but not in the way she expected or would have chosen.

Meantime the school was prospering in Ida's hands; and every one was satisfied, except Aunt Betsy, who never was satisfied with any thing. Ida and Amity, partly from real compassion, and partly, I fear, for the joke's sake, had set themselves to work to conciliate the old woman. Ida, who had a genius for millinery, made her a pretty cap, and Amity carried her a pound of very fine green tea, such as she liked; but all to no purpose. Aunt Betsy admitted that

the cap looked tolerably well, considering : she supposed it was fudged up out of some of Mrs. Van Zandt's old ones. As to the tea, she thought it was a queer color.

"That is because it is not colored at all," explained Amity, always sweet and unruffled. "Most green teas are dyed, you know ; but my aunt had this tea in a present from a Chinese gentleman who was a correspondent of my uncle's for many years, and who understands about such matters. He sends my aunt a chest of this tea every year. It cannot be bought in this country."

"Oh, yes, I dare say he makes her think so," was Aunt Betsy's reply. "I always heard them Chinese were up to all kinds of tricks. — They thought they were going to coax me round," she said to Miss Jewsbury afterward, in relating the interview ; "but I let them know that I wasn't going to be patronized."

"Well, I'm sure I wish she would patronize me that way," said Miss Jewsbury, who loved green tea, and did not often get it. "Do give me a drawing of it, Aunt Betsy. You might let me have it all if you don't want it. My girls don't like green tea, and I hardly ever have any."

"I never said I didn't like it, and you are as well able to buy tea as I am," was the reply. However, I suppose I can let you have a cupful. You can pay me in cheese."

But, though Aunt Betsy was not to be won over, Ida had plenty of friends. Even the Jewsbury girls liked her, and behaved better in school than they

had ever done before. The truth was, that Ruth had grown secretly tired of her rebellion against Miss Armstrong, and was glad of a pretext for giving it up ; and her younger sister followed her lead, as a matter of course. Ida had the teaching gift. She loved the children and the work for their own sake. She enjoyed success and popularity, as who does not ? and it was a source of exquisite pleasure to her to see the eyes brighten and the cheeks flush as she told them some story of heroism or self-sacrifice, growing out of and illustrating the history or geography lesson. The children began to repeat these stories at home. Miss Priscilla Davis, who had wanted the school for herself, pronounced it queer kind of teaching, — making a geography lesson like a novel. But Mr. Bassett declared he meant to put on a roundabout and pinafore, and come to school himself.

“I have a very interesting letter to read to you, girls, if you like to stay a few minutes after school,” said Ida one day. “You can do just as you please about it.”

All chose to stay ; and Miss Van Zandt produced her letter, which was from a friend engaged in the flower mission in New York.

“What is a flower mission ?” asked Ednah Fletcher.

Ida explained the matter as well as it could be explained to children who had never seen a tenement-house or a city court, and whose notions of the state of poor people were taken from Aunt Betsy and others like her.

“How dreadful !” said Faith. “But, Miss Van Zandt, what makes people stay in such places ?”

"Many are obliged to do so. They must live near their work, and rents are fearfully high in New York. Others know no better, and, if they did, have no means to get away. But, suppose you lived in such a place as my friend describes, would not you be glad to see some one who came to you with a bunch of flowers or a nice little plant?"

"Yes, indeed!" answered several voices; and Ednah added regretfully, "I do like to go to Ma Bassett's in winter, and see her plants. They look so nice when there is nothing but ice and snow outside!"

"Then you can think how nice such plants would be if there were nothing but dirty streets and courts to be seen outside," said Ida. "But, Ednah, does not your sister keep plants?"

"No, ma'am. She says they make so much dirt in the house."

"Miss Van Zandt, why couldn't we send a box of flowers to your friend?" said Ruth Jewsbury. "The golden-rods are beautiful now, and they last a long time."

"I declare! that is an excellent idea," said Agnes. "If we sent buds, they would bloom out in water."

"Golden-rod is so common, I should not think that they would care for that," said one of the children.

"Not very common in New York, my dear."

"Don't it grow by the side of the road in New York?" asked Eben Fletcher innocently.

The older children laughed, and Miss Van Zandt explained the matter.

"Well, I wouldn't live in such a place, not if you

was to give me fifty dollars," said the little boy positively.

"Nor I, not long at a time," replied Miss Van Zandt; "but you must remember, Eben, that there are advantages and disadvantages everywhere. — I will talk this matter of sending flowers over with my aunt, girls, and we will see what can be done."

The next day Ida again asked the girls to stay after school.

"My aunt is much pleased with your idea of sending a box of flowers, girls," said she. "Now, how many of you are willing to take your holiday to-morrow afternoon instead of Saturday, and give the time to gathering flowers and ferns?"

All the children were more than willing, only Faith Fletcher demurred.

"I should like it very much," said she, "but I was counting on Saturday afternoon to help sister. She isn't well at all, and I thought I could take some of the work off her hands on Saturday."

"What ails your sister?" asked Ida.

"She won't allow that any thing ails her," replied Faith, "and she will keep at work all the time; but she grows thin and pale, and I know she has a pain in her side. Father wants to have a girl, but she won't hear of it."

"She will find that very poor economy in the end," remarked Ida. "Well, I will tell you what we can do. You can come to school at half-past eight, instead of nine, and we will have only half an hour's intermission at noon, and no recess. Then I can let you go at three o'clock, which will give plenty of time for the

flower-gathering. And I must not forget to say that aunt Barbara hopes you will all come to her house to tea at six o'clock, and bring your flowers."

"Sha'n't we go home and get dressed?" asked Jenny Hurd. "We sha'n't look very nice."

"By no means," answered Ida. "Come straight from your flower-gathering. Soap and water are plenty, and that is all you will need."

"What kind of flowers shall we bring? any thing but golden-rod?"

"Oh, yes! all the flowers you can lay hands on, — yarrow and daisies and cockle, and, above all, plenty of green."

"I think a parcel of ferns would be nice," observed Kit. "I know where there are lovely ones, — ever so many kinds."

"They will be just the thing."

It was a very pretty sight that greeted the eyes of Mrs. Van Zandt and her nieces as the children presented themselves the next evening at six o'clock, laden with flowers of all sorts, wild and tame. Mrs. Bassett had not dared to let little Emma, who was a delicate child, go out with the others; but, to make amends, she had cut almost every flower in her garden, — dahlias, foxgloves, great spears of hollyhocks, and a huge bunch of lemon-thyme and sweet basil. Others brought sheaves of golden-rod as big as themselves. There were not many flowers in Oldfield County that were not represented in the collection. Kit brought a basket of ferns of all sorts, and a bunch of lady's-slippers, which she had found in a shady hollow, and another of the branching "bear's-

grass," or lycopodium. Finally, to crown the whole, appeared Edward Kettle with half a wagon-load of laurel. He had heard what the young ladies were about, he said, and he and his wife took the liberty to help them.

"What lovely laurel!" said Amity. "I thought it was all gone long ago."

Edward explained that he had found it, by his grandfather's direction, in a shady hollow far up on Indian Hill. "You see, the old gentleman has always lived right there; and there ain't many plants nor animals round these parts that he don't know."

"I should like to make his acquaintance," said Amity. "I have often seen him in church. Do you think he would be pleased to have us come and see him?"

"Oh, yes, miss. He's like other old folks, the old gentleman is," said Edward: "he loves to tell over his old stories. Some folks thinks it tiresome, but I don't, — I think it is real interesting; and anyhow, it pleases him."

"Well, you will see us up on Indian Hill some day soon," said Amity. "Meantime I should like to send him some tobacco-money, if he won't be affronted. I know he smokes sometimes."

"Oh, yes, miss. I don't think it's a very good habit, myself, but grandfather has done it all his life; and I says to Maria, says I, 'When an old man, and especially an old Indian, gets to be a hundred years old, it ain't much worth while to try to teach him new tricks,' says I. Not that Maria would want to interfere either, — 'tain't her way; but Mrs. Hills had

been talking to her about it, and saying she wouldn't have it if it was her. I can stay and wait on the table, miss, if it would be any accommodation."

"I dare say Aggy will be glad of your help," said Mrs. Van Zandt, to whom Amity referred the matter. And, having thus carried the point he had in mind when he started from home, Edward proceeded to display his gifts in that line, which were not small. Never was a more successful tea-party, after the first shyness of the children wore off. Old Alice had made a bountiful provision of sweets and substantials. Mrs. Van Zandt had sent to Oldbury for a supply of candy, which was put up in pretty boxes, and given to the children to carry home, with the addition of some nice little present to each.

"I wonder if Aunt Betsy would be offended if I were to send her some cake," said Ida to Myra Bassett, who had been specially invited, as she was putting up a parcel of good things for old Abner.

"Oh, yes, she'll be offended; but she will eat the cake, all the same," answered Myra, laughing. "That's her way. I'll take it to her if you like: I'm used to her."

CHAPTER XVII.

MRS. ORME.

MISS ARMSTRONG had not returned with Mrs. Van Zandt, finding business to keep her in New York, and hearing that the school was not suffering from her absence. When she did come back, she was able to tell the children of the safe arrival of their box of flowers; and she brought an urgent request from the lady to whom they had been consigned, for another box of leaves when the foliage should begin to turn. She also brought a quantity of missionary documents, which the children carried home to their parents, and talked over among themselves.

"Ma," said Myra Bassett as she finished reading one of these same papers, "why can't we have a mission band in our Sunday school? Just think! here is an Indian church in Minnesota, as poor as poverty, giving eighteen dollars in money and bead-work for the cause of missions;¹ and our school don't give a cent."

"We take up a collection every Sunday," said Mrs. Bassett; "to be sure, it goes to keep up the library."

¹ The White Earth church, which is a pattern in more ways than one. See Bishop Whipple's reports.

"Exactly; and I don't call that giving, at all. It is just like taking money out of one pocket and putting it into another. In Oldfield the Sunday school supports a Bible-woman in China."

"It wouldn't do to undertake quite as much as that at first, but we might do something," said Mrs. Bassett. "I expect we should have opposition from some quarters."

"So we did about cleaning the church, and yet we did it," said Myra.

"Very true. Well, I'll talk to your father; and, if he don't see any objection, I'll ask him to speak to Mr. Brace."

"I wish Mr. Brace had a wife," said Myra, who had "a true lover and a sweetheart of her own" sailing on the seas, and was therefore not afraid to speak. "It would seem so much more natural and easy to go to him."

"It is just possible your wish may come to pass," said Mrs. Bassett. "But, as to this notion of the mission band, I must say I like it for the children's sake. How much they were interested in the flowers they sent to New York!"

"Yes, and their interest did them good too."

Ma Bassett talked to her husband, and he in turn to Mr. Brace. The subject was then brought up in teachers' meeting. Miss Armstrong was present, and, being called upon, said what she thought, — that such efforts were as beneficial to those who made them as to those for whom they were made. Mr. Brace seconded her warmly, and gave anecdotes from his experience in other places. There was some

opposition, of course; but most of the teachers took up the idea with enthusiasm, and in the course of a few weeks the Oldham mission band was a fixed and prosperous fact.

But we must now follow the fortunes of another of our Oldham acquaintances. Selina was down at Oldbury staying with her sister, and taking singing-lessons of Mr. Schultz, the professor in the famous Oldbury schools. Lizzy was fond of Selina, and had begun by being much pleased with the arrangement; but she was growing uneasy, and wishing her sister at home again. Selina had made the acquaintance of a certain Mrs. Orme, who had come up from New York, and taken a house for the summer. Mrs. Orme was apparently rich, — at least, she spent her money freely, — she was handsome, and had a frank, not to say free, manner, which took Selina's fancy greatly. There was nothing to be said against the woman, but Oldbury did not take to her. Mrs. Orme's garden joined Mr. Woodbury's, and at her first coming Lizzy had shown her some neighborly civilities, though she had never responded to her attempts at intimacy. Nevertheless, the two families spoke together, and Mrs. Orme introduced herself to Selina over the garden hedge. She had heard her singing, and been struck with her fine voice. Mrs. Orme had a piano, and was no mean performer herself. She asked Selina to sing with her, and lent her the latest music. Mrs. Orme was in ecstasies over Selina's voice, and threw out broad hints of having her young friend to spend the winter with her, that she might have proper instruction.

"With that voice, and a few lessons in elocution, you might do any thing," said Mrs. Orme. "You might make your fortune."

"Singing at concerts, do you mean?" asked Selina.

"Yes, of course, or on the stage. You needn't look so shocked, child. A great many society ladies go on the stage now, just for fun. And, if you don't care to do that, there are always church choirs in New York where they will pay almost any price for a good soprano voice. You must practise diligently, and especially singing at sight, for that is all-important."

"Mr. Schultz says I improve in that, but he was very severe on me at the last lesson," observed Selina. He said, 'Miss Weston, you do not improve in style. You are imitating your friend Mrs. Orme, or whatever you call her, who sings in the manner of the beer-garden.'"

"Spiteful old hunchback!" said Mrs. Orme, coloring. "His mind is as crooked as his body, and his own style is that of a broken-down church-organ. But never mind. Wait till I get you to New York, my dear."

"I don't believe my father and mother will ever let me go," said Selina regretfully.

"They are not your own father and mother, and I don't see that you are bound to obey them," returned Mrs. Orme. "According to your own account, you have done work enough to pay for all they ever gave you. I don't doubt that they are very nice people," she hastened to add, seeing that Selina looked rather shocked: "I am sure Mrs. Woodbury is charming,

if she would condescend to be friendly; but she seems to have taken a dislike to me, for some reason. Ah, well, my dear, take pains with your music, and improve as fast as possible; and we shall see what can be done."

Mrs. Orme was right. Lizzy did not like her, and she was annoyed at the intimacy that Selina had struck up with her.

"I do wish you would not go to Mrs. Orme's so often," she said to Selina one day. "I am sure mother would not approve of it."

"What have you against Mrs. Orme, I should like to know?" asked Selina in a tone which said, "What business is it of yours?"

"I have nothing against her personally; that is, she has done nothing to me," answered Lizzy gently. "But I do not like her manners, and I don't like such intimacy with a stranger. We know nothing at all about Mrs. Orme."

"There spoke all Oldham," said Selina. "We don't know her, therefore she must be bad."

"I did not say she was bad," returned Lizzy. "But I do say that it is better to know something of a person's antecedents and present standing, before rushing into a violent friendship with them."

"Don't you see what an advantage it is to me to sing with her?"

"I am not so sure of that. Mrs. Orme has a fine voice, and plays well; but I don't think she has improved your style at all. Just compare her singing with Miss Van Zandt's."

"Oh, Miss Van Zandt! I hate the very name of

Miss Van Zandt; and I wish she and her model, Miss Armstrong, had never come near Oldham. They have set father and mother against me, and got me into disgrace; and all for what? Because I would not play the hypocrite, and pretend to be religious. I believe Miss Armstrong is a humbug, if ever there was one; but then, she can talk pious, and whoever can do that goes down with mother."

"I have no more to say, Selina," returned Lizzy. "Only I hope the time will never come when you will need the love and kindness you despise. But one thing I must add: I will not have my mother treated disrespectfully under my roof by any one. Remember that."

"Who treats her disrespectfully?" said Selina. "I guess I love mother as well as you do, any day, and would do as much for her, if I don't flatter her, and swear that every thing is right because she does it. But everybody is against me," she added, bursting into tears. "I have always been alone in the world; and, when I make a friend, I can't be allowed to enjoy her, because you are jealous of her. I should think you would be ashamed to show such a spirit."

"Heyday! what is that?" asked Mr. Woodbury from the other room, where he was taking off his boots preparatory to reading the evening paper in comfort. "I don't allow any one to scold my wife but myself, Selina. What is that Lizzy is to be ashamed of?"

Selina deigned no answer, but retreated to her own room to have her cry out. Having accomplished this act to her satisfaction; having told herself what a

sad thing it was to be an orphan ; having said to herself that every joy had its sting, and every rose its thorn, and that, while she must expect an ordinary person like Lizzy to be jealous of her musical talents, it was very hard that she should be placed in her power,—having said all this to herself, and a great deal more, she began to think, which is quite a different thing from talking to one's self. She reflected that she would be very foolish to quarrel with Lizzy and her husband. Suppose Mr. Woodbury should say that he would not keep her any longer ; suppose he should complain to her father : there would be an end of the singing-lessons, for which she had longed, and on which she built so many hopes. She had already thrown away one chance of improvement,—that of singing with Ida Van Zandt. Would it not be the greatest folly to lose another ? Then another voice began to make itself heard,—that of conscience ; a voice which Selina had not succeeded in silencing, and had not yet learned wholly to disregard. She *was* an orphan, with no claim of relationship to any human being that she knew of. She had never known of any home but the asylum in Oldbury ; till Mr. and Mrs. Weston came and took her home to the ease and plenty of the Oldham farmhouse. But for them she might still be living in the red-brick house on Elm Street, dressing on week-days in pink or lilac calico, and walking to church on Sunday with the other children, if, indeed, she had not been bound out as a servant somewhere. She could not deny, even to herself, that Mr. and Mrs. Weston had always treated her like a daughter,

that there was not a girl in Oldham who had more pretty things or more chances for education. Mr. Weston had bought the piano expressly for her, for Lizzy was not musical, and he had given her every advantage that the place afforded; while Mrs. Weston and Lizzy had done more than their share of the work, that she might have time to practise. Pursuing the subject with the obstinacy which belongs to that inconvenient counsellor, conscience further informed her that she had heretofore made a very inadequate return for all that had been done for her, that she had been often ill-natured and disrespectful, often careless, and always jealous lest perhaps Lizzy might have something which she had not. She knew that Mrs. Weston had made a great sacrifice in letting her come to Oldbury in the very busiest time of the year, that she might have the benefit of Professor Schultz's instructions before he went to New York. Mrs. Weston, like many notable housewives, disliked having hired help; yet she had taken in Mariette Jewsbury to assist through harvest-time, in order that she, Selina, might have a nice time in Oldbury; only making the condition that she should be guided by Lizzy in all things. What sort of a return was she making?

But Selina did not care to listen to the voice of conscience. She said to herself that she would be more cautious; that she would not quarrel with Lizzy, or come across her prejudices. It was perhaps only natural that Lizzy should be jealous of her friendship with a superior person like Mrs. Orme, and she must be careful not to annoy her. She would

go to work that very evening, and knit a pair of shoes for the baby, and that would make every thing right. She had just arrived at this conclusion when Lizzy called her to tea. She bathed her face and eyes, smoothed her hair, and went down prepared to be amiable.

"Horace and myself are going up to see mother Woodbury a little while," said Lizzy, after tea. "Will you go with us? Mother sent word this afternoon that she would like to have us come over."

"I don't think I will," answered Selina. "But I will go as far as Smith's: I want to buy a little yarn. But what about baby?"

"Oh, Jane will look after him. She likes nothing better, you know." Jane was the girl whom Mr. Woodbury, asserting his authority, had insisted on his wife's keeping, — a proceeding severely commented upon by Aunt Betsy and old Miss Jewsbury as an extravagant and "up-setting" proceeding.

"You know mother will be very glad to see you, Selina," remarked Mr. Woodbury. "You are a favorite with her, and she loves to hear you sing."

"She is very kind, I am sure," said Selina. "I will go some other time, but to-night I have something I want to do."

"I hope she won't go into Mrs. Orme's," said Lizzy as they walked away.

"And so do I. The fact is, Lizzy, that intimacy must be broken up, if Selina goes home to do it. I don't like the woman; and I like still less the style of visitors she has, the men especially."

"Some of them are not nice-looking, certainly.

However, I don't think Selina has ever been there when Mrs. Orme has had company. Well, we will think about it, and try to see our way. I rather wish we had not left her at home alone. However, I don't believe she will go there to-night."

Nevertheless Selina did go to Mrs. Orme's. She persuaded herself that there was something she did not understand in the pattern for a baby's shoe that Mrs. Orme had lent her, and that it was necessary for her to seek information. It could do no harm to run in just for a minute.

Mrs. Orme received her with open arms, and introduced her to a friend of her own from Boston, — Mr. Pyncheon, a member of one of the oldest Beacon-street families. No, she said playfully, they would not waste time over the stupid knitting; Mr. Pyncheon was an excellent judge of music, and he must hear her sing. Mr. Pyncheon seconded his hostess. He was a comparatively young-looking man, with very white hair and whiskers. He delighted Selina by his praise of her music. "I have not heard such a voice since I lost my own daughter," said he. "Miss Weston reminds me of her."

"She is like poor Angelina," said Mrs. Orme. "I noticed it myself. Isn't it a shame, Mr. Pyncheon, that such a voice should be buried in the wilds of Oldfield, and never heard except in the village choir?"

"It is indeed. Miss Weston ought to go to some of the great German schools. Even now her voice would be noticed in New York."

It is useless to repeat any more of the compliments by which Selina was fooled to the top of her bent.

She sang song after song, alone and with Mrs. Orme, till, warned by the striking of the clock, she returned just in time to meet Mr. and Mrs. Woodbury as they returned from their evening visit. Lizzy was greatly annoyed, and spoke more sharply than was at all common with her.

"I only went in to get a pattern Mrs. Orme promised me," said Selina, restraining herself by a great effort. "Mrs. Orme had some new music, and kept me to try it. I am sorry you are vexed, Lizzy; but you know I can't break off with her all at once, when she has been so kind to me in lending me music, and so on. I won't go there if you don't want me to, though I must say I can't see any harm in her."

Already sorry for her severity, Lizzy said no more; and Selina, warned by what had happened, actually staid away from Mrs. Orme's for three whole days.

CHAPTER XVIII.

TROUBLE AT HOME.

"WHERE have you been all this time?" said Mrs. Orme to Selina, waylaying her as she came from her music-lesson. "I have not had even a glimpse of you."

"It hasn't been my fault, Mrs. Orme," answered Selina.

"Call me Eva," interrupted her friend: "'Mrs. Orme' sounds so cold and formal. Why haven't you been in? Mr. Pyncheon was so anxious to hear you sing again. I wanted you to be friends with him, Selina: he has neither chick nor child, and he has no end of money. He said, after you went out, 'How I wish that child belonged to me! I should be so glad to give her a first-rate musical education.'"

"Did he?" asked Selina. "I know he said my voice was like his daughter's."

"Yes. Poor thing, she went to the bad, — made a runaway match, and he never saw her afterward; though he heard that she died somewhere in this neighborhood, and left a child. It was that brought him to Oldbury, — to see if he could find any trace of her. Just think, Selina, if you should turn out to

be Mr. Pyncheon's grand-daughter, what a grand thing for you !”

“I don't believe there is any chance of that,” said Selina. “I never asked any questions ; but I always supposed my parents lived here, and were very poor people.”

“They would naturally want you to think so,” said Mrs. Orme reflectively, more as if she were addressing herself than speaking to Selina. Then, catching herself up, “But that might be true too. Poor Matilda married beneath her ; as I said, a very common sort of man, — her father's coachman, in fact, and I dare say she might have died very poor. It was a terrible blow to her parents, and fairly killed her mother. After the first natural heat of his anger was over, Mr. Pyncheon made every effort to find his daughter, but without success. Then he went abroad, and has just come home. He has gone back to Boston now, but when he returns we will talk to him. Come in and spend the evening with me. I have a lot of new songs for you to try.”

“Mr. Schultz does not want me to sing any more songs just now,” replied Selina. “He has given me a parcel of scales and exercises to practise.”

“Nonsense !” said Mrs. Orme. “However, singing scales is very good practice. But you can come over and see me, all the same.”

“I don't believe I can, but I will see. I must go now, at any rate, Mrs. Orme, — Eva, I mean : it is dinner-time.”

“Barbarous hours !” said Mrs. Orme. “Well, good-by, dear. I will contrive to meet you somehow.”

Selina went home as if she were treading on air, her imagination all on fire with the news she had heard, and the brilliant prospect which seemed opening before her. As she said, she had never asked about her own parents ; being restrained by a vague feeling that she might hear something she would not like. It was pleasanter to dream of wealthy and distinguished relatives coming to claim her, than to know for certain that her mother was a poor laundress or something of that sort. And now it really seemed as if her day-dreams were coming true. Mr. Pyncheon's grand-daughter ! Pyncheon was such an aristocratic name, that of one of the oldest New-England families. It was worth while to have such an ancestry as that, Selina said to herself. She did not reflect that this grand ancestry had not kept her mother from running away with the coachman, who certainly could not be considered a very aristocratic connection ; still less did it occur to her to suspect, what was the fact, that Mrs. Orme had invented the whole story to serve her own purposes. Mrs. Orme had a plan with regard to Selina, and she was not likely to spare any amount of lying needful to carry it out. Selina saw a great deal of her for the next week. Old Mrs. Woodbury was ailing ; and, as she had no own daughter, Lizzy naturally devoted as much time as possible to waiting upon and comforting her mother-in-law. Whenever she went out, Mrs. Orme popped in, or called Selina into her own house. As the two grew more intimate, Mrs. Orme was more off her guard ; and she did and said some things which certainly struck Selina as peculiar. For example, she

drank wine and beer very freely, and on several occasions there was an odor of tobacco-smoke about the house which Selina could not account for. Selina, who had been brought up on strict total-abstinence principles, ventured to remonstrate ; but she was met with a torrent of ridicule, which speedily silenced her.

"You poor little chicken, brought up in a coop among the daisies ! It is really refreshing to meet with such innocence. But you must put these strait-laced Puritanical notions out of your head before you come to New York, or we shall have you making a laughing-stock of yourself. Fancy any one talking like that to my friend Mrs. Robert Livingstone on Fifth Avenue ! Why, the wine alone at Mrs. Livingstone's last lunch-party cost three hundred dollars."

The idea of making herself a laughing-stock to an unknown Mrs. Livingstone on Fifth Avenue was enough to silence Selina ; but, happily for her, even the name of that great lady could not make her break her Sunday-school pledge by taking the glass of champagne Mrs. Orme urged upon her.

"I can't, Eva ; I have promised not to touch it, and I can't break my word."

"Oh, well, if you have promised, of course that is all about it," said Mrs. Orme ; adding to herself, "I will drive all that nonsense out of you, my lady, before I have had you long."

But Selina was not destined to enjoy any longer the dangerous delights of Mrs. Orme's society. The very day after the temperance lecture, Mr. Bassett came for her. Mr. Weston had fallen from the barn-

loft, and broken his leg. It was a bad fracture; he was perfectly helpless, and Selina must come home and help wait upon him. There was nothing for it but to go; and, to do Selina justice, she never thought of any thing else till she ran in to bid Mrs. Orme good-by.

"What a shame," said that lady, "to take you away from your music and all, just to wait on that old farmer, who is not related to you!"

"I should not have had many music-lessons only for that old farmer, as you call him," said Selina indignantly, her better nature roused for the moment.

"Well, don't be angry. I did not mean any disrespect," said Mrs. Orme, perceiving she had overshot her mark. "Of course it is very kind and self-sacrificing in you to go. I suppose you will be back before long."

"I can't tell. It will depend upon how father is. Good-by, Eva; I must not keep Mr. Bassett waiting."

"Don't you want something to read?" asked Mrs. Orme, hastily gathering together and tying up a quantity of paper books, with which her room was always strewed.

"I don't believe I shall have much time to read, but I will take them," replied Selina. "Good-by, Eva, and thank you for all your kindness."

"Good-by, dear, till I see you again. I shall write to you. And see here, Selina; don't hamper yourself by any more pledges and promises. And I wouldn't say any thing about Mr. Pyncheon, if I were you. Your friends would not like it, and might put obstacles in your way. And you must see, that, if he

is really your grandfather, he has the best right to you."

"Of course," said Selina. "I really must go, Eva. Good-by."

Selina could not restrain her tears as she took her seat in the miller's comfortable carriage; and Mr. Bassett, respecting her grief, was silent for the first mile or two. By that time Selina had recovered her self-control, and began to ask questions.

"Is Miss Armstrong at our house?"

"Oh, yes! Ma wanted her to come to us, and Mrs. Van Zandt sent for her up there; but she left it to your ma, and she said Miss Armstrong made no trouble in the house, and was such a comfort she couldn't bear to part with her."

"Well, I wonder she should care to stay," said Selina. "She and Mrs. Van Zandt are such great friends, and she would be much more comfortable up there."

"Miss Armstrong isn't the woman to be always thinking first of her own comfort," replied Mr. Bassett. "She and I together took care of your pa last night, and persuaded your ma to go to bed; and a better nurse I never saw. She knows where to put her hand every time. Symantha Mallory was down in the afternoon to see if there was any thing she could do."

"I should not think mother would care to have *her* about," said Selina.

"Oh, well, I don't think there is any harm in Symantha. Every one agrees that she took good care of her stepmother; and she keeps Kit just as

neat as a pin, though she hasn't much to do with, I fancy, for Phin isn't going on very well. Kit comes to church and Sunday school regularly now ; and ma says she never had a better scholar, only she asks such queer questions. We have another new scholar, too, — a great friend of yours."

"You don't mean Milly Richmond!" exclaimed Selina. "What brings her to Sunday school, of all people?"

"I don't know, I'm sure, unless she wants to learn something. I can't think how she has grown up to know so little about the Bible. Poor Kit is a good Bible scholar compared to her. But she behaves very well, I must say that for her, and seems interested in her lessons."

"I should not think Mrs. Richmond would allow it," said Selina, "she is so very liberal in her views."

"So liberal that she doesn't want her daughter to have any opinion of her own, eh? Isn't that a funny kind of liberality?"

"Perhaps so. But I have heard her say that she did not wish to bring up her daughters to any religion ; when they were old enough, they could choose for themselves."

"That might do, perhaps, if trouble and death would only wait till people are grown up," remarked Mr. Bassett. "But they don't, as Mrs. Richmond ought to know by this time. Poor Cordelia is failing fast, as Mrs. Gleason thinks ; but her mother won't allow it at all."

"I suppose Agnes was confirmed last Sunday."

"Yes ; and her mother too, and Sarah Leet, and

my Abner, and about ten more. It was a blessed day, I can tell you. We all wished you were there, Selina."

"What makes you turn up this way?" asked Selina as Mr. Bassett turned his horses into a cross-road.

"Well, it cuts off quite a piece of the distance, and it is good enough this time of year. It is rather lonesome, but we needn't mind that as long as we take daylight with us."

"I don't mind it: I like it," said Selina, "the woods are so pretty. Do you think father will be laid up long?"

"Well, yes, I'm afraid he'll have a tedious time. You see, he is getting an elderly man; and, beside the broken bone, it was a pretty severe shake for him. I hope he will get well, I'm sure; for, beside the blow to his own family, he would be a dreadful loss to the neighborhood. But he is in the Lord's hands, my girl, and there we must leave him."

"How is mother?"

"Just what she ought to be, neither more nor less," said Mr. Bassett with emphasis: "never thinking about herself, always doing and saying the right thing at the right time. I'll tell you what, Selina, if you don't turn out a good girl, you'll have a great deal to answer for. Never girl had a better father and mother than you have, nor a pleasanter home."

"Well, I hope I shall turn out a good girl," said Selina. "Why should you think I won't, Mr. Bassett? I don't think I have been a very bad girl so far."

"I don't say you have, — far from it," answered

Mr. Bassett. "Only, if you'll excuse my plain speaking, Selina, I don't think you have always appreciated your advantages. But then, none of us do that; and perhaps it isn't to be expected of young folks. I tell my boys, sometimes, I believe they think money grows on bushes, like blueberries."

"How did Miss Van Zandt get on with the school?" asked Selina, willing to turn the conversation.

"Oh, famously,—as well as Miss Armstrong herself. That young lady has a genius for other things beside music. She knows how to teach what she has learned. The children think her perfection."

"Yes, she gets on nicely with little ones," said Selina. "She knows how to amuse them, and she is so childish herself she is like a companion to them."

"Childlike, if you choose, not childish," replied the miller. "There is a difference."

"I don't see it."

"Well, it seems others do. St. Paul says, when he became a man he put away childish things; but our Lord says we must become as little children, or we cannot enter the kingdom of heaven. There is just the same difference between 'childish' and 'child-like' as between 'womanish' and 'womanly.' 'Womanish' implies all the weakness, and 'womanly' all the strength, of a woman. Miss Van Zandt has all the simple, frank, unaffected ways of a nice child. She never seems to think whether any one is looking at her or not."

"There it goes!" thought Selina. "I never was so tired of any one's name in my life."

"Isn't there some one on the road there before us, Selina?" said Mr. Bassett. "I am rather short-sighted, and I have forgotten my glasses."

"Yes, two men; one looks like Phin Mallory," said Selina, bending forward to look. "Yes, it *is* Phin Mallory. There, they have turned into the woods. Why!" exclaimed Selina in a tone of great surprise, and then she checked herself.

"Why, what?"

"I thought the man with him looked like a gentleman I saw in Oldbury; but it couldn't be, of course."

"Well, they won't interfere with us," said Mr. Bassett. They had now come to the place where the two men had disappeared, and discovered Phin in the act of lighting a cigar; but nothing was to be seen of his companion.

"Halloo, Phin! Have a ride?" said the miller, pulling up.

"No, thank'ee, Mr. Bassett; I'm going up through the woods to look for a stray critter of mine. You didn't see him, did you, — a red steer with a ball on one horn?"

"I saw him in your pasture-lot when I drove by, this morning."

"All right, then: he has got home before me. No, thank'ee, I won't ride. My cigar might annoy the young lady. How's the squire?"

"Much about the same, only his head is all right to-day."

"Tell his folks I'll come and sit up any night. I used to be reckoned a good hand in sickness."

"I dare say. I'll tell Mrs. Weston. Well, good-by, if you won't ride. Take care of that cigar of yours in the woods, for every thing is as dry as tinder. By the way, who was that you were talking with just before we came up?"

"Talking with? Nobody," replied Phin with a curious tremor in his voice. "Oh, yes: a tramp asked me the way to the village. You'll pass him farther on, I dare say."

"Poor Phin! he has good streaks in him, after all," said Mr. Bassett as they drove on. "They say he was kind to his wife. And it was neighborly in him to offer to sit up with your pa. You might have thanked him, Selina."

"I was thinking of something else," said Selina, with perfect truth. It could not be possible, she thought, and yet certainly the man she had seen talking with Phin Mallory bore a very strong resemblance to Mrs. Orme's aristocratic Boston friend, Mr. Pyncheon.

CHAPTER XIX.

OLDHAM AFFAIRS.

WITH the atmosphere of home, Selina's better nature revived for a time. The sight of her father's resolutely endured suffering, and of her mother's pale, cheerful, patient face, brought back the old respect and affection. Then, she felt herself to be a person of consequence; and that was agreeable to her, as it is to most people. She took the whole care of the dairy, and most of the housekeeping, off her mother's hands, and attended to it with an efficiency and quietness which equally pleased and surprised Mrs. Weston. She spoke of the matter to Miss Armstrong.

"I always thought Selina had great capabilities," said Miss Armstrong. "All she needs is, to forget herself; and you see she can do so when the motive is strong enough. Certainly her style of doing things is very unlike Mariette's. I shall never have any opinion of that girl again."

For Mariette had taken herself home at the very beginning of the trouble, alleging, as an excuse, that she never could endure to be where there was sickness, it made her feel so bad to see any one suffer.

“What can you expect?” said Mrs. Weston. “Those girls have been brought up to think of nothing on earth but pleasing themselves,—having a good time, as they say; and no better motive than self-pleasing has ever been put before them. The notion of duty has never entered their heads. Their aunt is just the same. When she was young, she found pleasure in finery and such dissipation as came within her reach. Now she finds it in the laudanum-bottle. I do think that a passion for dress and amusement is almost as ruinous to women as drink is to men.”

“You might say so if you had seen what I have,” replied Miss Armstrong. “More girls are utterly destroyed by the passion for finery than from any other one cause.”

Selina had begun by heartily wishing Miss Armstrong away; and she had even ventured, in her mother’s absence, to give some broad hints that she thought Miss Armstrong would be much more comfortable somewhere else, and, in fact, that her room would be better than her company. But Miss Armstrong paid no attention to these hints. She knew that her presence in the house added nothing to the work, and was a comfort to Mr. and Mrs. Weston, for whom she had conceived a very earnest friendship. She was very careful not to interfere with Selina in any way, and to lighten her labors whenever it was possible; and by degrees Selina became reconciled to her presence, and even admitted to herself that Miss Armstrong was a great help in the sick-room. She had been at home more than a week,

and Mr. Weston had been pronounced out of danger, when Mrs. Weston called Selina into the dairy, or milk-room as they call it in those parts.

"Daughter, suppose you take a pitcher of this nice buttermilk up to Cordelia Richmond," said she. "Mrs. Gleason was telling me yesterday that it is almost the only thing the poor child fancies. It will be a nice walk for you, and you can stay and have a visit with the girls."

"Well, I will," answered Selina. "I have not seen Milly since I came home. And I will come round by the post-office, and get the mail. What do you think of my churning, mother?"

"It is beautiful," answered her mother. "I don't see but I may give up the care of the milk to you altogether, Selina: you manage every thing as well as I could, myself. But you must let Jerry lift the pails for you. God bless you, my child! You are a great comfort to us."

Selina took up her jug of buttermilk, and went on her way, well satisfied with herself and with all the world. She found Milly and Agnes sitting together on the porch, their heads closely bent over a large book which they held between them, and their attention so absorbed that they did not hear her till she spoke to them.

"What in the world are you so busy with?" asked Selina. "You started, when I spoke, as if you had been shot."

"Studying in my grandfather's old 'Matthew Henry,'" answered Agnes, closing the volume, and laying it aside.

"That is something new for you, Milly. You did not use to care much about the Bible."

"No," answered Milly with none of the embarrassment which Selina had expected, and perhaps had hoped to see. "One doesn't care for things that one knows nothing about; but I am beginning to find out that it is worth reading as a story-book, if for nothing more. What have you in that pretty old blue-and-white pitcher? If mother sees it, you will hardly get it back. She has a mania for blue-and-white."

"It is a very old pitcher, but I never supposed there was any thing precious about it," replied Selina. "It is only earthenware, not china."

"*Only* earthenware! Just hear her! Lovely old Liverpool blue, and an American piece at that. Do let me look at it. See, Agnes, here is the State-house on one side, and — let me see what — actually Faneuil Hall on the other."

"Don't spill Cordelia's buttermilk in your admiration of the pitcher. It is just churned, and mother thought she might like it. How is she?"

"I don't see that she is a bit better, though mother thinks so," answered Milly sadly. "I think she fails all the time. She likes the buttermilk, and it seems to suit her. I am ever so much obliged, Selina."

"I am sure you are very welcome. I wish I could do more than that for her, poor thing."

"There is one thing I wish you or some one would do for her," said Milly as Agnes carried away the blue jug to dispose of its contents, "and that is, to persuade mother to let Cordelia see a minister. The poor child wants it so much!"

"Why, won't your mother allow it?" asked Selina.

"No, she won't hear of it." She would not see Mr. Brace herself when he called. I was in hopes Dr. Madison would come, but he has gone back to New York. I think perhaps mother would have seen him for the fashion of the thing."

"Miss Armstrong told me she called to see Cordelia, but your mother said she was not fit to receive company."

"I believe it was for the same reason. She is so afraid some one will say a word to Cordelia about dying. She won't let Agnes, or even Mrs. Gleason, stay with her. I read the Bible to her, and she likes it; but of course there is a great deal I can't explain."

"Is she afraid of dying?"

"Not always. She said to-day, if she could know her sins were forgiven, she should be happy; but she does not see how she can be sure, so Agnes and I were looking out the texts about it. I'm sure I should like to comfort her if I could, poor thing. Do sit down a little, Selina. I have hardly seen you since you came home, and I want to hear what kind of time you had in Oldbury."

"Here is your pitcher, Selina. But you will have to excuse me," said Agnes, re-appearing: "my bread has come up so suddenly that I must mould it up directly, or it will be running over."

"Why, where is your mother?"

"She has gone up to see Patience Fletcher, who is sick in bed."

¹ I wish this were an exaggeration; but it is a literal fact, occurring within my own knowledge.

"Is she? What is the matter?"

"Only overwork, the doctor says. You know she always would do every thing herself,—never would let Faith or any one help her, for fear they would not set all the teacups with the handles the same way; so now she can't set them up at all. Martha Jane Kettle is staying there to help, and she told me she wouldn't mind the work a bit if only Patience wouldn't fret so."

"Does she suffer so much?"

"Oh, it isn't that. She bears her pain like a martyr; but she is so afraid Martha Jane won't do every thing just in her way, though she is as neat as wax, and a splendid cook. Martha Jane said to her one day, 'See here, Miss Patience, if you was in heaven, do you think you would be worrying about the work all the time?' And Patience said, No, she supposed not. 'Well, then,' says Martha Jane, 'try to think you *are* in heaven, and leave me and Faith to manage the things on earth.' But there, I must go; my bread will be walking about the floor. Stay to tea, Selina, and see what nice rolls I'll have for you."

"So you are really going to Sunday school, Milly," said Selina when they were left alone.

"I really am; and, what is more, I like it."

"Whose class are you in?"

"Miss Celia Claxton's, only old Mrs. Van Zandt has it now."

"Oh," said Selina, as who should say, "Now I understand." Milly colored.

"Yes, that was it exactly, to begin with," said she frankly: "I did want to be acquainted with the Van

Zandts, and I thought it would be a good way to bring it about. So, when I heard that Miss Celia had gone to Elmfield for a month or so, and Mrs. Van Zandt had taken the class, I told Agnes I would go with her."

"A fine motive for going to Sunday school, I must say," said Selina sarcastically.

"Wasn't it? Well, that was the beginning; but I got interested in spite of myself. Madam Van Zandt makes every thing so real; and she was very kind to me, and made me feel so mean — *that* wasn't nice, a bit, I can tell you. So, one day when she walked home, I walked with her; and then I just told her all about it."

"Amelia Richmond! you didn't."

"I did, then, just as I am telling you."

"What did she say?"

"I can't tell you all, only she was just as good as she could be, and didn't despise me as I was afraid she would. She talked about the danger of loving the world, and how little it was worth, after all."

"Yes, it is very well for her to say so, when she has every thing that money can buy," interrupted Selina.

"But think how many things money can't buy, Selina. It can't give her back all the children she has lost. Just think! nine children she has had, and not one left. All the money in the world won't make Cordelia well again. Well, I can't tell you all she said, but she asked me to keep on coming; and I have, because I like it, as I said. And, after all, Selina, if religion is any thing, as Agnes says, it must be every thing."

"What does your mother say?"

"I don't think she likes it very well; but it is Mrs. Van Zandt, so she won't say I shall not go."

"And do you really mean to be a Christian out and out?"

"That is just the point. You see, if I do, I am afraid I shall have to give up a great many things that I should like to keep. To be sure, I know a great many church-members who are just as gay as those who are not; but I could not be like that. It would be all or nothing, with me. But now tell me about yourself. Did you have a nice time? Your mother said you had made a great friend of some New-York lady. Who was she?"

Selina poured out the story of her intimacy with Mrs. Orme. Milly listened seriously; but, when Selina came to the story of Mrs. Robert Livingstone's lunch-party, she broke out, —

"Nonsense, Selina! The Robert Livingstones are the most strait-laced temperance people in the world, and never give wine at all. Mrs. Livingstone gives beautiful lunch-parties, — or so I have heard, for of course I never went to one: she is a long way above our mark, — but every one knows how they feel about wine."

"Perhaps it was some other Mrs. Robert Livingstone," said Selina. "Mrs. Orme said they lived on the corner of Fifth Avenue and Nth Street."

"It is the very same, but I don't believe *she* ever visited them. She has been humbugging you," said Milly with her usual bluntness. "Did she bring any letters of introduction, or any such thing?"

"Not that I ever heard of. The ladies in Oldbury don't like her, and don't visit her much ; but she has a good deal of company, — gentlemen friends from New York."

"And she has asked you to spend the winter with her?"

"Yes ; and she says she will give me every advantage of lessons from the best masters, and introduce me to all her friends in society."

"Well, Selina," said Milly seriously, "if you will take my advice, you will let this Mrs. Orme alone ; at least, till you know something more about her. I must say I don't think it very nice for her to try to get you to leave Mr. and Mrs. Weston for her. And, as to society, you had better know what kind of society she keeps. She may be the mistress of a beer-garden, for aught you know."

An uncomfortable remembrance of Mr. Schultz's remarks upon Mrs. Orme's singing returned to Selina's mind, and kept her silent. In truth, since she had been away from Mrs. Orme's personal influence, a good many things in that lady's conduct and conversation had come back to her in a new light, especially when she compared her with Miss Armstrong and the Van Zandts. The dreams of life in New York as Mrs. Orme's guest, or in Boston as Mr. Pyncheon's grand-daughter, had been too agreeable to be at once relinquished ; but they had been of late gradually fading away in the clear, bright light of her refined Christian home.

Certain misgivings had arisen in her mind as to the gentlemen she had met at Mrs. Orme's, and the

way in which Mrs. Orme treated them and was treated by them. Milly's plain-spoken remarks chimed in with these same misgivings, and irritated her accordingly.

"You have taken up the true Oldham cant, Milly," said she: "'I don't know her, therefore she must be bad.'"

"'I don't know her, therefore I won't be intimate with her,' would be a better way of putting it," answered Milly, not in the least ruffled. "But, Selina, I don't think your father and mother would let you go; at least, till they know more about this Mrs. Orme. Have you said any thing about it to them?"

"No, of course not. It would be a nice time to talk about it now, wouldn't it? What do you take me for?"

"For a goose," was Milly's inward reply, but she did not utter it. She was silent a moment, and then turned the conversation into another channel by inquiring about Selina's musical studies. The seed which Mrs. Van Zandt had sowed in Milly's heart had already brought forth fruit in the shape of some consideration for the feelings of other people.

"I must go, Milly," said Selina, starting as the clock struck five. "I have to go to the village on my way home."

"I wish you could stay to tea."

"I wish so too; but, you see, I have the care of the dairy now. Come and see me."

"I will. I would walk part of the way with you, but Cordelia is sure to ask for me the minute she

wakes. She has taken a great liking to me, poor thing; I'm sure I don't know why, for I have never been very kind to her."

Selina was not very sorry to be left to a solitary walk. She had been vexed at Milly's remarks about Mrs. Orme, and, as I have already said, all the more because they chimed in with her own misgivings.

"But I don't care, I will believe in her anyhow," she said to herself. "Milly says that the Livingstones are above their mark, and I dare say Eva knows more about them than she does. I do hope I shall have a letter from her!"

Selina's hope was destined to fulfilment. She found a long letter from Mrs. Orme, written on the most elegant perfumed paper, in the most fashionable of hands, — so very scratchy and sharp-pointed, indeed, as to be almost illegible. She took the short way home, which led through a somewhat deep and shady ravine by the side of the river. Once in the shadow of the woods, she walked along reading her letter. It was full of protestations of affection. Mrs. Orme told how she missed her young friend, and how she longed for the time when she should have that same young friend all to herself. "Of course you cannot leave Mr. and Mrs. Weston, as things are at present," she wrote; "but it is absurd to think of your being bound to them forever. The idea of a girl of your sort being bound an apprentice! The very idea is degrading; and your own self-respect, if nothing else, ought to make you throw off such a yoke, laid upon you without your own consent. To think of my noble, beautiful Selina apprenticed like

a boy from the workhouse put out to learn a trade !” There was much more to the same effect in Mrs. Orme’s letter, which filled no less than three sheets of paper.

Selina had always known that she had been legally bound to Mr. Weston at the time of her adoption, — a precaution usually very advisable in such cases. It had never occurred to her to think of this binding as any degradation, or as any thing more than a legal form, always observed when a child was put out from the Oldbury asylum. Now, as she read Mrs. Orme’s letter, her cheeks flamed ; and she clenched her hands, and stamped her foot, in shame and anger.

“I am a slave, — that is the truth. Mother scolds me for calling myself a hired girl, but it seems I am not even that. But I won’t endure it: I will never be a slave, never! I wonder why Eva does not say a word about Mr. Pyncheon.”

As she spoke, Selina came to where the path made a sudden turn round a projecting angle of the rocky bank. As she did so she started violently ; for she stood face to face with a man, and that man was Mr. Pyncheon himself. For a moment he seemed as startled as herself ; then he recovered his presence of mind.

“My dear Miss — I beg pardon, I have forgotten the name ; but I am sure I met you in Oldbury.”

“Miss Weston,” said Selina ; feeling, as she spoke, a pang of mortification that Mr. Pyncheon should have forgotten her already. “Have you seen Mrs. Orme lately? I have just received a letter from her.”

"Mrs. Orme? Oh, yes, our friend in Oldbury," said Mr. Pyncheon, recovering his usual ease, not to say freedom, of manner. "That was where I met you. No, I have not seen her in some time. Did you say you had a letter from her? I hope she is well."

"She is very well," answered Selina. "I wonder she did not tell me you had returned. Are you staying at Oldbury?"

"No — yes, for a day or two. I drove over with a friend who will be waiting for me, so I must ask you to excuse me. Perhaps we shall meet again at Mrs. Orme's. Good-afternoon."

He held out his hand; and Selina, though deeply mortified, could not refuse it. At that moment Kit Mallory came down the path singing as usual. The moment she caught sight of Mr. Pyncheon and Selina, she stopped short an instant, as if petrified; then, turning, she fled up the path, as if pursued by a wolf.

"Who is that child?" asked Mr. Pyncheon, looking after her with an expression which seemed to Selina equally compounded of fear and anger.

"Her name is Kit Mallory. She is a kind of adopted child of a family who live up on the hill. You can see the end of the house a little farther on. Do you know them?" she could not help asking, remembering what she had seen or fancied on the cross-road.

"Mallory? no. In fact, I don't know anybody about here. Good-evening, Miss Wilson." And, turning round the rock, he was out of sight so quickly that Selina could not help thinking he must have

climbed the bank and hidden himself among the bushes. Thoroughly confused by this strange interview, she walked hastily homeward, till, just where the path came out into the open field, she found Kit evidently waiting for her.

"Selina," said Kit, speaking under her breath, and looking around her, "you must not talk to that man: he is a very wicked, bad man."

"Nonsense, you little goose! He is a gentleman from Boston whom I met in Oldbury. His name is Pyncheon."

Kit shook her head. "He is no more Mr. Pyncheon from Boston than you are. *I* know him, if he changes his hair a dozen times a day. He is a bad, wicked man; and if you talk to him you will be sorry."

"Nonsense!" said Selina again. "You are a very silly little girl, and very impertinent besides, to say such things about a gentleman. Don't you think my friend Mrs. Orme knows him?"

Kit shook her head, but said no more. She had apparently discharged her conscience; and, bidding Selina good-night, she turned again toward the village,—not by the ravine this time, but by the high road,—and Selina saw her look behind her more than once, as if fearing pursuit.

Selina took her own way homeward, a good deal mortified and still more puzzled by the conduct of her late acquaintance. Certainly his recognition of her, such as it was, had not been flattering. He had seemed in a great hurry to get away; and, if Kit had been scared at the sight of Mr. Pyncheon, Selina

could not get rid of the idea that Mr. Pyncheon had been equally scared at her. In short, she could not tell what to make of it; and, between the meeting and Mrs. Orme's letter, she returned home in any thing but a comfortable frame of mind.

CHAPTER XX.

WARNING.

KIT did her errands at the village store, gathered her parcels together, and, not without fear and trembling, prepared to set out on her homeward walk. At the door she found Abner Bassett with his father's team and wagon.

"Halloo, Kitty! Want a ride home?" was his cheery greeting. The offer of a ride was an ordinary civility; and Kit was a great favorite with the family at the mill, from Ma Bassett down to the latest baby. Kit gratefully accepted the offer, and climbed into the rattling lumber-wagon with as much pleasure as if it had been the finest coach in the land.

"I have to go round by Aunt Betsy's to take home her molasses-jug, so I can set you down right at your own gate," said Abner as he took his seat, and started up his horses. "Well, and how are you getting on at your house? Your uncle doesn't come to Bible class any more?"

"No," said Kit sadly, "I can't coax him to come; but he lets me go, and he doesn't say a word against my going to Sunday school. Last Sunday he took

my library-book, and read it all through. That was nice, wasn't it?"

"Very," said Abner encouragingly. "I'll tell you what, Kitty: next Sunday I'll pick out a real interesting book, and you shall take it home to him."

"Oh, thank you! Perhaps he will come after a while, if he likes the books."

"Perhaps so. You love your uncle, don't you, Kitty?"

"Yes, I do," said Kit with emphasis. "Uncle Phin is always good to me when he doesn't drink, and he was always good to poor aunt Martha. It seems to me sometimes as if he was two men; and one man wanted to be good, and the other wouldn't let him. I don't know as you understand what I mean."

"Yes, I do: I've felt that way myself a good many times."

"Well, I can't help hoping that the good man will get the best of it some time," said Kit.

"We will all hope so," returned Abner. "Here we are at Aunt Betsy's, and here she is looking out for us. Now she will have something nice and pleasant to say. Can you hold the lines while I get out the parcels?"

"Oh, yes: I am never afraid of horses," replied Kit. "When we lived in the Indian country I used to ride the ponies bare-backed."

"Good for you! I'll give you a ride on my black colt some day. — Halloo, Aunt Betsy! Here's your shopping."

Aunt Betsy appeared at the door, candle in hand. "Dear me, Abner! you needn't holler so. I never

did see such boys for yelling in all my born days. Did you get the coffee? Seems to me it feels dreadful light for half a pound. Where's the molasses? Now, you didn't go and forget that molasses-jug, Abner Bassett? There never was any thing like boys."

"Hold on, Aunt Betsy. The jug is in the wagon all safe. Here it is, you see; and here is some ham, or something, Mrs. Andrews sent you."

"Why couldn't you say so, then?" snapped Aunt Betsy. "Ham, is it? Just like Harriet Anne Andrews. Why couldn't she send me some fresh meat?"

"On the whole, I believe it is beefsteak, and not ham, Aunt Betsy."

"There is a slice of ham in with the beef," observed Kit from her perch in the wagon.

"Yes, I dare say you looked at it. What business had you a-peeping and a-swooping into my parcels, Kit Mallory?"

"I didn't look into it," answered Kit indignantly. "I was in the kitchen, and saw Mrs. Andrews do it up. She told me last Sunday she would give me some nice papers if I would come after them, so I did; and I had to wait a little, because she said she was just doing up some things for Aunt Betsy Burr."

"Yes, that's a likely story; not but that it would be just like Harriet Anne Andrews to tell everybody what she was doing. — Well, there, I guess you've got every thing, for once. You can tell your ma, if she has got more plums than she wants, I should like a few to make sauce of."

"Aunt Betsy is rather worse than usual," said Abner as he drove away.

"What does make her so cross?" asked Kit. "Is it because she has had so much trouble?"

"She has never had any great trouble that I know of," replied Abner. "Her husband, Uncle Jonathan, was one of the best and kindest men that ever lived, and always waited on her like a slave; but he was not one of the kind that make money, and that vexed her. I do think she fairly worried the old man into his grave. Since then all the neighbors have looked after her and done for her; but she is never satisfied, and never would be, whatever they did."

"I often think she must be lonesome living by herself so."

"Well, that is her fault too. Lucinda Jane Peabody went to stay with her; but, after she had tried it a month, she told ma she would rather go and keep house for old Kettle on Indian Hill than stay with Mrs. Burr. And I am sure I would," concluded Abner. "The old Indian is good-natured, at any rate. Well, here we are, Kitty. Have you got all your papers? Good-night, and thank you for your company."

Kit had been in some measure diverted by Abner's chat and Aunt Betsy's scolding; but, as she climbed the somewhat long and steep ascent from the bars to the house, her fears returned upon her with double force; and it was with a very anxious and troubled face that she sought out Symantha, whom she found taking care of the milk.

"Well, Kit, did you have a nice walk, and get

your papers? Why, what ails you, child? You look as if you had seen a ghost."

"I have seen something worse," answered Kit in a low tone. "Symantha, what do you think! I have seen Gale again, and he was talking to Selina Weston."

"Are you sure?" asked Symantha.

"Just as sure as that I see you. I went down the brook-path; and, when I came round the corner, there he stood talking with Selina. I saw him shake hands with her."

"Impossible!"

"Yes, he was. He has got white hair and whiskers; but I should know him by his eyes and the shape of his face if he were to paint his face black."

"What did you do?"

"I turned and ran till I came to the road; and then I waited for Selina, and told her who he was."

"And what did she say?"

"She called me silly and impertinent, and said he was a gentleman from Boston that she had met in Oldbury. But I knew him well enough; and, what is more, I believe he knew me."

"I hope not," said Symantha, evidently much discomposed. "I do wish I knew what was going on. I believe that man is making a tool of father, and drawing him into some scrape."

"Then you believe it was Gale?"

"Yes, Kit, I do, because I think I saw him myself down in our woods the day the steer was lost, — the day Selina Weston came home. He was dressed very smart, and had white hair, as you say; but I

thought of Gale in a moment. More than that, I believe some one has slept in the barn chamber more than once, and that father has carried provisions to him. What can he be about?"

Kit thought a moment; and then she drew Symantha into a little room which opened from the pantry, and shut the door.

"Symantha," she whispered, "I don't know what you will say; but do you suppose they can be planning to rob Mrs. Van Zandt?"

Symantha dropped on a seat, her face as white as her apron.

"Kit, what do you mean? What makes you think so?"

"Well, a good many things. It is the only house round here that would be worth the risk, for one thing. And there is another reason. You know uncle Phin would not let me go near Mrs. Van Zandt's for ever so long. He did not like it because I went to the flower party; and he would not let me go again, though Miss Van Zandt asked me, and offered to teach me to make lace. Then all at once he turned round, and wanted me to go." Kit sank her voice still lower. "And ever since I began, he has asked me such queer questions when I am alone with him."

"What sort of questions?"

"Well, about the silver, — how much they used, and where they kept it. And yesterday, when I was helping him pick the harvest apples, he asked me if I had ever been in the ladies' rooms, and where they kept their jewels."

"And what did you tell him?"

"I told him I didn't know any thing about it, and that I had never been in any of the up-stairs rooms only Miss Bogardus's when she was teaching me the lace stitches; and I didn't believe they had any jewels with them only the diamond ear-rings Madam Van Zandt always wears. And then he muttered that he knew better, and that folks ought to have more sense than to bring such things to lonely country houses. And it *is* lonesome," added Kit. "The house stands so far back from the road, with no other anywhere nearer than this, except Miss Claxton's; and I don't know what good they could do. You *don't* think uncle Phin would be led away to do such a thing as that?"

Symantha pressed her hands hard together.

"I don't know, Kit. If he were left to himself he would cut his hand off before he would do any thing to injure Mrs. Van Zandt. But he is in this man's power, — at least he thinks so, — and there is no telling — Hush! there he is."

And at that moment Phin's voice was heard, calling harshly, "Here, Symantha, Kit, where are you all?"

"Don't say a word, for your life," whispered Symantha; then aloud, "Here I am, pa. What is it?"

"Where's Kit? I want her. — See here, Kit, what do you mean by hanging round Andrews's store, and being out after dark?"

"I was not out after dark, uncle Phin," answered Kit. "I have been home this half-hour. I went to get some papers Mrs. Andrews promised me, and I caught a ride with Abner Bassett."

"Yes, I know you did ; and a nice figure you made, perched up on his wagon-seat. I won't have you riding round with young fellows in that way. Do you hear me, or not ?"

Kit could not well help hearing, for Phin spoke very loud ; and, hard as his language was, Kit could not help thinking that his anger was assumed. She answered quite meekly, —

"I am sorry, uncle Phin. I didn't mean any thing wrong,"

"Oh, no, you never mean any thing wrong," returned Phin in the same loud, harsh tone ; and, glancing toward the window as he spoke, "you go to bed, and stay there, — that's what I want of you. Go this minute," as Kit cast a glance toward her papers. He paused a moment, and then added, with a curious irresolution in his tone and manner, "There, you can take your books and a light, if you like ; but go up stairs, and stay there. — Symantha, I want you to take a light, and look up in the back chamber for the bottle of horse-liniment. I know I put it up there somewhere, but I can't find it."

"Here's the bottle on the shelf by the clock, uncle Phin," said Kit, taking it down as she spoke. Phin snatched it from her, and set it back with such a trembling hand that he dropped it, and it broke to pieces on the hearth.

"There ! see what you made me do. That is not what I want. It is a large green bottle with a wooden stopper. I know I put it up in the back room. Kit, why don't you go to your room, as I told you ?"

"I am going, uncle Phin," said Kit, gathering her papers together. "And I'll tell you what I am going to do when I get there: I am going to kneel down, and ask God to keep you away from wicked men who want you to do wicked things." Then, coming close to her uncle, she threw her arms round his neck, and whispered in his ear, —

"Uncle Phin, don't ; please don't. Just think what aunt Martha would say if she knew. And God loves you more than she did, — I know He does. O uncle Phin, don't !"

"Don't what? Don't be a fool," said Phin. "There, I am not angry with you, child," he added with the same curious irresolution in his tone, unclasping, but not ungently, the arms which clung round his neck. "Go to bed, like a good girl, and pray as much as you like. You sit up too late, and that is what makes you so thin. — Symantha, are you going to find that bottle? or do you want the colt to die before I get it?"

"I don't think I can, father," said Symantha, who had dropped on the nearest chair. "I have had one of my headaches all day, and I am so dizzy just now I can hardly stand. I was going to ask you to help me up stairs."

She tried to rise as she spoke, but nearly fell to the floor. Phin caught her in his arms. "I'll carry you up," said he. "Come, Kit: you hold the light, and then go to bed yourself."

Phin laid his daughter on the bed, and kissed her tenderly enough.

"There, Kit will help you to get settled," said

he. "You will be better when you have had a good rest."

As soon as Symantha had dismissed Kit, she rose, and, though blind and giddy with pain, she crept to the other side of the house, where a small window looked toward the barn. She had waited only a few minutes when she saw her father leave the house with a basket; and presently she saw, or thought she saw, a gleam of light from the loft. Yes, there it was again; and then she saw it, but only for a moment, from the window of the little bedroom over the stable, which Kit had used all summer for a play-room. Phin had lately taken possession of this room for a harness-room, as he said, and had fitted it with a stout lock and key. Symantha sighed deeply, and even groaned. She was like one who sees a friend in horrible peril, and is unable to lift a finger to save him. She knew there was no use in talking. Like other weak people, Phin had an abundant fund of obstinacy, and was excessively jealous of being governed. Such people are sometimes said to be easily led; and so they are in some directions, as a stone is easily started down hill. But try to roll your stone up hill, and you will find that a very different matter. Symantha had wondered at her father for taking Kit's remonstrance so quietly; but then, he had been exceedingly kind and indulgent to the child ever since his wife died, even going so far as to attend the schoolhouse meetings with her two or three times, where he had been made very welcome. But all the good in the universe is of no use to a man so long as it is outside of him, as the wise old German has it.

Phin's feelings had been touched, and his natural musical taste pleased by the singing; but his will remained the same. He had made a solemn promise to his dying wife, which at the time he fully meant to perform; but he was waiting from day to day, "till things should be different," he said. Meantime Satan was not idle, but was working by one of his most active agents, now awaiting Phin in the barn chamber.

"Well, here you are at last," was the salutation Phin received as he entered the room. "I thought you were never coming. What kept you?"

"Well, I had to get the women-folks out of the way."

"Bother the women! Why don't you send them adrift? That young one will bring you into trouble yet. I believe she knew me this afternoon."

"Nonsense! How could she know you? She has not seen you since she was a baby. But say, Harry, I wish you would give this thing up."

"Why?"

"Oh, because. I have a feeling that harm will come of it; and, besides, the old lady was kind to my poor wife."

Gale poured out a flood of abuse upon cowards and soft-heads who did not know their own minds; ending with, "But I'll tell you what, Phin: if you play me false, I'll have your life, just as sure as you live. I have planned to do this thing, and I am going to carry it through; and you are going to help me, or you are not going to see sunrise to-morrow."

"Who said any thing about playing false?" asked

Phin sulkily. "You do well to bully me, don't you? Where would you be this minute but for me?"

"I know, and I don't forget it; but I won't be played fast and loose with."

"And, as to playing false, you had better look out for somebody besides me," continued Phin. "Much need to talk to me, when you put your head in that woman's pocket."

"What, Sally? She's as true as steel. You ought to see her playing the fine lady there in Oldbury. Well, there, go and get a nap, and I'll do the same; but keep one eye open, and call me at one: and remember, no fooling!"

Phin crept back to the house ashamed, enraged, wretched as a man could be; feeling himself a slave, and lacking courage to make a stroke for freedom. A French writer has said, that, to reap any benefit from sin, a man must be altogether wicked; and Phin was not that. His conscience, though blunted, was not dead. Since he had lived in Oldham a good many things had happened to bring to mind the teachings of that Christian mother and sister whose memory he still revered. He had more than half made up his mind to give up all his old courses, and betake himself to a decent, sober life. But then the tempter had come in his way, — the man who, as he believed, had him in his power, — and the weak will had yielded to the strong one. He had been led into more than one piece of wickedness in his absences from home. Now came the crowning atrocity, for so he felt it. He was being made a tool of to rob, perhaps murder, the woman who had been a mother to his wife. To

be sure, Gale had promised that there should be no violence; but what was his word worth? The fright alone was enough to kill such an old lady. There was not a man about the place, he knew, for the coachman had gone to Oldtown to meet some friends of Mrs. Van Zandt's who were coming by the early morning train. Nobody was there but three or four weak women. Phin flung himself down in the rocking-chair, — his wife's chair, — and groaned almost aloud. "Talk of going to sleep!" he said to himself. "You might as well tell a man to go to sleep when the Indians were pouring hot coals on his head." The clock struck nine — ten — eleven. How dreadfully fast the hours were going on! It would soon be time to call Gale.

Suddenly a thought flashed across him. What if he should send them warning? If they were all awake and up, and the house lighted, surely Gale would never dare go near it.

Nothing is so dear to a weak mind as a compromise. Phin rose to his feet in an instant, found his way softly up the stairs in the dark, and opened Kit's door. He dared not strike a light, lest a ray should betray him; but it was a starlight night, and the large window was wholly uncovered, so that his eyes, accustomed to the darkness, saw the bed and its occupant. As he bent over, and laid his hand on her arm, Kit, who was always a light sleeper, started up broad awake on the instant.

"Uncle Phin, what is it?"

"Hush!" said Phin sharply. "Kit, listen. Are you afraid to run up to Mrs. Van Zandt's? You can

go along by the trees, and nobody will see you. Are you afraid to go—to save Mrs. Van Zandt and the young ladies?”

“I’m afraid, but I’ll go,” was Kit’s characteristic answer. “But how shall I get out without—any one seeing me?”

“Go down the front stairs, and out at the little side door: that is out of sight from the barn. Keep along the road in the shadow of the trees till you come to the turn by Crossett’s red barn, then go across lots. Quick, now, if you are to do any good.”

Kit was up and dressed in an instant. “What shall I say?” she asked.

“Tell them to get up and have lights burning, and to make as if they had company. Tell them—Oh, bother! tell them what you like; but be quick if you are going to do any good.”

“Wait one minute,” said Kit. For a brief space, which did not seem long even to Phin’s impatience, she knelt by her bedside. Then, taking her shoes in hand, she crept down stairs, slipped out of the little side door, leaving it ajar behind her, and glided like a shadow out at the gate, and up the road shaded with maple-trees of sixty years growth. Phin watched the little figure as far as he could see it, and then went to the other side of the house, and looked toward the barn. All was quiet there; and he returned to his chair, to be tormented by a hundred misgivings, and to wish he had let the child alone. He had sent her into terrible danger, for he well knew that Gale would never hesitate to murder Kit if he caught

her. The hour set, one o'clock, was drawing very near. Why could he not have thought of it before? Kit would never have time to reach the stone house; and perhaps she could not succeed in waking the ladies, even if she did. He wished he had gone himself, or let the matter alone. Poor Phin! a great part of his life had been spent in doing things, and then wishing he had not done them.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE NET CLOSED.

KIT sped swiftly and silently as a mousing-owl under the shadow of the great maple-trees, where the soft, short grass returned no sound to her tread. It was not till she reached a spot out of sight of house and barn that she stopped to put on her shoes, without which she dared not try to ascend the stony path. It was soon done; and she took her way up the hill, stopping more than once to look round, and strain her eyes through the darkness. She could not resist the conviction that some one or something was following her, stopping when she stopped, and moving when she moved. Her blood chilled at the thought. Could it be Gale, who had seen her, after all? Or was it — what?

Kit had heard plenty of wild stories, and had abundance of superstitious fears. She had heard from her Indian friends, of creatures which roamed at night to entrap unwary travellers; first scaring them out of their senses, and then tearing them to pieces. She had heard, too, from the school-children, about the great snake, which at least once in the

year crossed the town of Oldham from Indian Hill to the Big Swamp, and back again, — who should say on what errand? She had heard, too, of panthers (or “painters,” as the children called them), — wild animals, but endued with more than animal cunning and malice; and, like every old New-England town, Oldham had plenty of legends of goblin and ghost, witch and what not.

“But they can’t hurt me unless He lets them, and I don’t believe He will,” said Kit sturdily to herself, after a longer pause than usual, during which she was sure she had heard the breaking of a dry twig under some one’s foot. “I don’t believe Gale saw me, and I’m sure nobody about here would hurt me.”

So saying, she hastened on more rapidly, as if to atone for her delay; but it seemed an age to her before she reached the turn by her favorite ledge, and saw the stone house not far away, and a dim light burning in Madam Van Zandt’s window. The next room was Amity’s, she knew; but how to rouse them? She stood a second to consider, and then took up a handful of gravel, and threw it against the window.

Waked by the noise, Amity started up; but, before she could strike a light, the sound came again, and a soft voice called, “Miss Bogardus!” She sprang to the window, and, opening it, saw a little dark figure below.

“O Miss Bogardus, hurry and let me in!” said Kit in a tone of entreaty, for her courage was fast giving way. “Oh, do hurry! I am sure I hear them.”

"What is it, Amity?" asked Ida sleepily from the next room.

"It is Kit, and she wants to come in," answered Amity; and again came the agonized entreaty, "O Miss Bogardus, do hurry!"

It seemed an age to Kit, though it was not more than a few minutes, before she was admitted to the side hall, where were assembled Mrs. Van Zandt, Amity, and Ida, and another tall young lady whom Kit did not know.

"Fasten the door, quick!" were Kit's first words. "Fasten all the doors and windows."

"Yes, yes, we will fasten them," said Amity soothingly. "My dear child, what is the matter?"

"Fasten the doors; never mind me. Oh, do be quick! they will be here."

"Who will be here?" asked Ida.

"The robbers. Uncle Phin sent me to tell you. They are coming to rob the house to-night. Don't ask me any more questions, but hurry and fasten up every thing. They will be here: I heard some one coming up the hill. Oh, do hurry! they will kill you."

Ida, never very courageous, looked at Amity in dismay. The tall young lady, whom Kit did not know, stepped into her room, and brought out a neat little case, which she began to unlock.

"There will be two words to that," said she coolly. "How many are there?"

"Only two that I know of, but there may be more. Uncle Phin sent me to tell you. Oh, why *don't* you hurry and fasten up every thing?" said Kit,

clasping her hands in an agony of impatience, as the girls looked at each other.

"My dear child, I don't understand you," said Mrs. Van Zandt soothingly. "I almost think you must have been dreaming."

Kit stood up, and strove to speak calmly; but, before she could answer, Percy broke in, —

"Excuse me, Mrs. Van Zandt, but I think we are the dreamers. If the child's story is true, we have not a moment to lose; if it is false, we shall only have lost our labor. Don't stand staring, girls, but collect the valuables, and carry them to some safe place. — Aggy, get together Mrs. Van Zandt's jewels and laces. Amity, you and Ida take the spoons and silver. Is there any money in the house?"

"Only a few dollars."

"So much the better. Come, girls, be quick."

"Wouldn't it be better to dress, and run down to Miss Claxton's?" suggested Amity.

"And so run right into the arms of these men, as likely as not," said Ida. "Besides, aunt Barbara could not do it. No, Amity: Percy is right. Don't waste a moment. — What are you going to do, Percy?"

"Stand here and keep guard for the present," answered Percy, examining the charges of her revolver, and changing a doubtful-looking cartridge.

"But you won't shoot anybody?" said Mrs. Van Zandt.

"Not if I can help it. Dear Mrs. Van Zandt, do let Aggy take you up stairs."

"How cool you are!" said Ida, pausing a moment,

with her lap full of spoons. "I wish I were like you. I am horribly frightened."

"So am I," answered Percy; "but, if you had lived two years and a half in Arizona, you would know that the more scared you are, the cooler you need to be."

In a very few minutes every thing of value was stored in a strong closet built for such purposes, and not easy to find unless the searcher knew where to look; and the ladies betook themselves to the front bedroom over the door, and awaited their unwelcome visitors. They had not long to wait. In less than half an hour, stealthy steps were heard, and the handle of the door was carefully tried. To Ida's terror, Percy opened the window and called, "Who is there?"

"Let us in," was the response.

"Not till I know who you are."

"Look here, young woman, just you let us in peaceably, and we won't hurt you: if we have to let ourselves in, perhaps we shall. We mean to have what is worth having in this house, and you can't help yourself."

"That's Gale," whispered Kit. "He'll kill you all, as likely as not, if he gets in. He doesn't care what he does."

"He won't get in," answered Percy; then, speaking to the men outside, "We have fire-arms, and know how to use them. The first man who enters this house is a dead man."

"Do come away, Percy: he will shoot you," urged Ida.

"No, he won't; but I have said my say, so I'll shut the window."

"Hark! What are they doing now?"

"Sawing out the panel of the door," answered Percy. "Don't you hear them? I must unfasten this door so as to meet them before they can get up the stairs. Did you lock all the doors below, Amity?"

Amity held up the keys.

"Good! then they can't do any thing *but* come up stairs. What are they stopping for, I wonder? Hark! What is that?"

There was a little silence, then the sound of a scuffle; and a shot was heard, followed by a heavy groan. Percy ventured to open the window and look out. She saw two figures stretched on the ground, surrounded by two or three more.

"What is it?" she called.

"All right, ma'am," answered a cheery, manly voice from below. "We got here just in the nick of time. Please open the door: there's no danger now."

"Who are you?" persisted Percy. But, before she could receive an answer, two more figures appeared upon the scene, and a voice she well knew called out, "Halloo! what does this mean?"

"What are you going to do, Perry?" asked Mrs. Van Zandt as Percy sprang to the door and unlocked it.

"Don't be in a hurry, Percy," chimed in Ida: "it may be all a plot to get in."

"A plot, you goose! Do you think I don't know Abram's voice?" Percy ran down the stairs; and

Amity advanced to the head of them in time to see her unlock and unchain the front-door, and throw herself upon a tall, stalwart figure, with a cry that had something decidedly shaky in its sound.

"There, there, my girl, don't go into hysterics. What's the matter?"

"No wonder the lady is scared," said a voice from behind, as a stout man in a blue uniform entered the hall: "it was enough to scare any one. But the danger is all over now, only we must get this wounded man under cover. There is a heavy thunder-gust coming up. If the lady will tell me where to find a small mattress, it will be easier for him."

"In the little blue room, Aggy," said Mrs. Van Zandt.

"With your leave I'll help her, ma'am," said the stout man, stepping up the staircase with two strides, as it seemed. "Ah, yes, this is it. Careful now, men; mind the other fellow. — Perhaps you and your friend will bear a hand, sir."

In another minute or two a desperately wounded man was laid on the wide sofa in the hall, and Kit had thrown herself on her knees beside him with a cry of anguish.

"Uncle Phin, O uncle Phin! speak to Kitty."

"Kitty," said Phin, opening his eyes. "Is Kit safe? Then it's all right." He sank back with a sigh, and closed his eyes.

"Oh, do some one go for the doctor!" cried Kit, wringing her hands. "Don't let him die. O uncle Phin!"

"Hush, my child. I am a doctor, and I will see

to him," said the second new-comer, advancing to the sofa. "Ladies, please step out of the way. Policeman, I shall need your help. Take the child away, Ida. — Yes, my dear, you shall see him again directly."

"And now what is all this about?" asked Abram van Alstyne, depositing his wife on the sofa. "Frank and I walked over from the railroad, and the first we knew found ourselves in the midst of a battle."

Ida told the story as far as she knew it. "As for the rest, you must ask our champions themselves," she concluded. "They may have come out of a cloud, for aught I know. I am sorry poor Mallory was the one to be shot, for it was he who sent us warning."

"So much the better for him," remarked the tall policeman. "But it was none of us who shot him: it was that fellow Gale, or Burchard — he has a dozen names or more. We have been watching for him for a week. His wife put us on his track at last. We came up just as they started out, and followed them every step of the way. — But what brought you up here, sis?"

"Uncle Phin sent me," sobbed Kit. "He told me to come up and tell the ladies. Oh, do you think he will die?"

"I don't know, child. He is badly hurt, I am afraid; but we shall hear what the doctor says. Here he comes now. — Well, doctor?"

"It is a desperate case," said Dr. Van Alstyne. "He may last till morning, or even a little longer if kept perfectly quiet; but it would be instant death

to move him. He knows his condition, and is very anxious to see Mrs. Van Zandt and his daughter."

"Potter, you might go down for the woman," said the tall policeman. "Get out the horse, and bring her up."

"Well, my poor man, this is very sad," said Mrs. Van Zandt, seating herself beside the wounded man. "Dr. Van Alstyne says you wish to speak to me."

"You are Mrs. Barbara Van Zandt, who adopted Martha Kathleen Joyce?" said Phin.

"Yes, my friend."

"She was my wife," said Phin, speaking slowly but quite clearly. "She was my cousin's widow, — David Selkirk's widow. He died, and left her and her child to my care; for I was pretty steady then, and was helping him in his business. Afterward I married her. There was quite a good deal of money coming to her and the child, but I fooled it away gambling and horse-trotting. Gale got most of it. Then my wife went crazy; and I was afraid a fuss would be made about the money, so I passed off Kit as an adopted child. Her mother never knew her till just at last. Then she made me promise to put the child into your hands; and I meant to do it, but I kept putting it off: I hated to part with her. And there was the money."

"I should not have troubled you about that," said Mrs. Van Zandt. "O my poor little Kathleen! To think of her dying so near me!"

"There was more about it than that," said Phin. He paused a little, and then added, "The farm is Kit's by rights. Grandfather left it to David. I

found the first will at Mr. Green's in Oldbury, and proved it. Afterward I found the second in grandfather's desk. It is there now. Symantha don't know any thing about it. You'll be kind to Symantha, won't you?" said Phin, turning his eyes wistfully on the old lady. "She is a good girl, and she was good to Matey."

"Indeed I will!" answered Mrs. Van Zandt, "as kind as if she were my own daughter. Oh, if you had only come to me at once!"

"Well, I meant to," said Phin feebly; "but, you see, I kept putting it off. I felt so ashamed. David left them ten thousand dollars, and I just fooled it away. I've been a fool all my life; but I was good to my wife, wasn't I, Kit?"

"Yes, indeed!" sobbed Kit, "always."

"He must not say another word if he is to live to see his daughter," said Dr. Van Alstyne in a low tone. "He is sinking fast."

"Just one thing more," said Phin. "I want to see Gale."

The prisoner was brought forward strongly guarded. He gazed at the dying man without a sign of emotion in his hard, cruel face.

"Gale, do you think I sold you?"

"I know it," answered Gale.

"You are mistaken," said Phin eagerly. "I did send Kit up to warn the ladies; but I never betrayed you, did I, Cap?"

"No," answered the policeman, "you had nothing to do with it. Some one else put us on the track at last."

"Who?" asked Gale, changing color for the first time.

"Never mind, my man: you'll hear all about it in time."

"Not — not Sally?" Then, as it seemed reading an assent in the man's face, he set his teeth hard.

"Phin, I'm sorry," said he, suddenly turning to the dying man. "You've saved my life, and I've taken yours; but I was mistaken. I'm sorry, that's all I can say. — There, take me out of this."

Phin was silent for a little, and seemed to fall into a doze, from which he waked with a start.

"Where am I? Oh, I know. It's most over, I guess. Kit, can't you sing that hymn you sung for aunt Martha? Seems to me I should like to hear it."

Kit tried hard to sing, —

"Jesus, lover of my soul,"

but the effort was too great. Ida took it up; the two gentlemen joined her, and they sang it all through. Phin listened quietly.

"My mother used to sing that," said he. "She believed in Him. She taught me to say my prayers, too; but I can't remember them now, it is so long ago. Kit, what was that verse you said at the Bible class that night I went with you? Say it for me."

"'The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth us from all sin,'" repeated Kit. "O uncle Phin, do believe in Him! He will save you, I am sure He will. — Won't He?" she asked, appealing to Mrs. Van Zandt.

"Yes, indeed He will, if you look to Him," an-

swered the old lady. "It is never too late to turn to Him in this world. — O Frank! pray with him."

All knelt, while, in a few plain, earnest words, Frank Van Alstyne commended the dying man to the Fountain of all mercy. Phin evidently followed, and understood the words.

"Thank you," said he faintly. "I guess ma was right, after all. I am a poor wretch, but He can save me if He is what you say. — There, don't cry, Kit. Be a good girl, and mind Mrs. Van Zandt. — Lord, have mercy on me!"

These were his last words. He lay in a sort of slumber, starting now and then, till Symantha came in. He evidently knew her; for he pressed her hand, and tried to put it into Mrs. Van Zandt's. The old lady understood the movement, and bent over him.

"Have no fear, Mr. Mallory: your daughter shall have every care and help."

Phin smiled, sighed once, and all was over.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE END.

OF course, by nine o'clock the whole town of Oldham was ringing with the news of the robbery and the capture. Aunt Betsy burst in upon Mr. Weston's family at the breakfast-table. But, before she had time to tell her tale, Miss Delia Claxton popped in at the other door.

"Oh, *have* you heard? Isn't it dreadful! And that poor man to be taken so!"

"It serves him right," said Aunt Betsy grimly. "I only hope folks will have enough of those Mallorys," with a fell glance at Miss Armstrong. "I always said it was a shame to let that young one go to school with decent folks' children."

"But what is the matter?" asked Mrs. Weston. "What has happened?"

"Why, a gang of robbers, with Phin Mallory at their head, have robbed Mrs. Van Zandt's house, and would have murdered every one in it only the police came and caught them," said Aunt Betsy. "And that Kit showed them the way, and told them where all the jewels were, and all. Only last night she was

at my house riding on the wagon-box with Abner Bassett, just as bold as brass. I hope he feels proud of his company, that's all."

"You are very much mistaken, Aunt Betsy," said Miss Delia: "it was Kit who gave them warning. Phin sent her on purpose."

"Yes, that's likely. I should like to know how you know so much better than any one," snapped Aunt Betsy.

"Because I had the news from headquarters," answered Miss Delia. "Mrs. Van Zandt sent Aggy down for me by daylight this morning; and, when I was helping to lay poor Phin out, Aggy told me the whole story;" which story Miss Delia repeated with great precision.

"So Phin is dead," said Mrs. Weston. "Poor fellow!"

"Yes, he is dead; but I can't help hoping he had grace to repent at last, from what they told me. The other robber was—who do you think?—Harry Burchard. Yes, that very little curly-haired boy that I dressed in the first trousers he ever had on. It seems his wife has been living in Oldbury, pretending to be a great lady from New York; and he has been visiting her off and on, calling himself Pyncheon, and disguised like an old gentleman. She took that Whitman cottage, and they say it was she who betrayed him, to try to get off herself; but she didn't, for the house was just full of stolen goods." Miss Delia stopped for want of breath.

"Selina," said Miss Armstrong, "would you mind going up to my room to shut my window? I left it

open, and my papers will be blowing about the carpet."

"Selina looks pale," observed Miss Delia as Selina disappeared.

"She has not been well for a day or two," answered Miss Armstrong. "I think she has worked too hard for her strength. So it was Kitty who carried the warning?"

"Yes. It seems poor Phin's heart misgave him at the last; so he put Kit out at the front-door, and the poor child ran all the way over the hill, and got there just in time."

"There! I knew she had a hand in it somehow," said Aunt Betsy triumphantly. "Well, give me folks that one knows something about. What could you expect from a poorhouse young one like that?"

"But that she should risk her life to save her friends," said Miss Armstrong, finishing the sentence.

"And as to knowing about people, I am sure we know all about Harry Burchard," said Miss Delia. "His grandfather was minister of Rivermouth; and his father was old Mr. Burchard of Pentaquam, as good a man as ever lived. Such sacrifices as they made to send that boy to school and college!"

"They used to indulge him awfully, though," returned Aunt Betsy. "His mother used to let him put sugar in his bread and milk. I have seen him do it."

"And as to Kit's family, it turns out to be as good as anybody's," continued Miss Delia. "Her father was Phin's own cousin, David Selkirk, — you remember him, Abby, — and her mother was a Miss Joyce,

daughter of an excellent Irish minister who emigrated to this country. His wife died of cholera on the ship, and the poor man only lived a few months after her. Mrs. Van Zandt adopted the little girl, and brought her up. But when she was eighteen she got acquainted with David: so marry him she would, and did, and went out West with him; and Mrs. Van Zandt never saw her afterward."

"Yes, that's the way," said Aunt Betsy. "Adopting children is flying in the face of Providence, anyway."

"Mrs. Van Zandt told me she was struck with Kit's resemblance to this poor thing the first time she saw her," continued Miss Delia. "She is going to keep the child for her own, only Kit stays with Symantha for the present."

"How did Symantha take it all?" asked Mrs. Weston.

"Very hard, poor thing. She closed her father's eyes, and kissed him; but she never shed a tear, and her face was like ashes. Presently she says to Mrs. Van Zandt, 'Did pa tell you about the child and the money?' And Mrs. Van Zandt said yes, but not to mind about the money: she had plenty. And then Symantha said, 'I should like to keep Kit with me for a few days.' And Mrs. Van Zandt said Kit should stay as long as she liked; and she kissed Symantha, and thanked her for all that she had done. And they got her to crying at last. Then she went home; and I went with her, and got her to lie down and take some tea. Celia is up there now, helping Ma Bassett put the house in order."

"I should think she'd be afraid," said Aunt Betsy.

"Oh, there's nothing to be afraid of: an officer or policeman is staying there. They searched the house and barns, but they didn't find a thing but what belonged there; and nobody thinks Symantha was any way mixed up in it. Of course she may have had her suspicions; but nobody could expect her to betray her own father, even if she had known for certain."

"Poor thing! and poor Phin!" said Mrs. Weston. "I hope he had grace to repent."

'Between the saddle and the ground,
If mercy's sought, mercy's found.'

"Maybe so, but I don't believe in death-bed repentances," said Aunt Betsy. "I never knew one to come to any thing."

"I never knew many people *after* their death-beds, so I can't judge," said Mrs. Weston dryly. "I guess I'll send Ezra up to Mallory's with a loaf of bread and the chicken-pie I made yesterday. I can get something else ready for Sunday, and it will save them trouble in cooking."

Selina went up to Miss Armstrong's room, and closed the window. Then she retreated to her own, and sat down, not so much to think as to stare aghast at the gulf which had opened at her feet, and into which she had been so near falling. For she had been very near it: only last night, sitting in that very chair, she had made up her mind that she would write to Mrs. Orme, and arrange to return to New York

with her. She would have done so then and there, but that, on opening her desk, she found she had used all her paper. Suppose she had done so. Suppose the exposure had been delayed a few days, long enough for her to leave her home, and meet Mrs. Orme at Elmfield, as that person had proposed. The thought turned her cold and sick. It never occurred to her to doubt the truth of the story. On the contrary, a hundred things went to confirm it. She had had more than one fit of cold misgiving as to the character of her friend, since her return home; and her talk with Milly had shaken her more than she had been willing to own to herself at the time. But then, the net had been such a very tempting one, and it had been so skilfully laid in the sight of the silly little field-bird, discontented with its nest, and longing for a wider flight. And now it would all come out, and every one would know. Kit would tell how she was talking with that murderer. What should she do? Where could she hide? She rose to her feet with some wild idea of running away, and hiding from the disgrace; but her limbs trembled so, she could not stand, and she dropped down again.

She was sitting with her head hidden on her folded arms, conscious of nothing but a crushing load of shame and misery, and that vague, unreasoning wish to die which so often seizes on young people in the presence of their first overmastering trouble, when a gentle hand was laid on her arm, and a gentle voice said, —

“My daughter.”

“O mother, don’t!” moaned Selina. “Oh, send

me away somewhere, where I shall not be a disgrace to you. Oh, I wish you had never seen me."

"Hush, my dear, hush. Don't say such things," said Mrs. Weston gently. "Why should I send you away? Suppose you have been foolish, and made a mistake: what better place than mother's house could you find?"

"I have been more than foolish," said Selina, raising her head. "You don't know half how wicked and ungrateful I have been. Only last night — Oh! I can't tell you. Oh, what shall I do?"

"Don't try to say any thing," said Mrs. Weston. "Drink this coffee, and lie down; and by and by you shall tell me the whole story. Don't be afraid, dear: mother will always stand by her girl."

Selina was thankful for the permission to stay out of the reach of prying eyes and questioning tongues. Mrs. Weston undressed her, and bathed her hot head.

"God help you, my child!" said she, kissing her. "Try to compose yourself, and to look to your heavenly Father. Trust Him, my dear. Whatever happens, your father and mother will not forsake you; and His love is stronger than theirs."

"How good, how lovely, she is!" thought Selina, with a feeling of absolute wonder. "She knows I am mixed up in this horrible, disgraceful business, and yet she never gives me a word of reproach or unkindness. And I was ready to leave her for that — How could I be such a fool? But I have always been a fool. How shamefully I have treated Miss Armstrong, and how kind she was this morning! I

do believe I should have dropped in another minute."

It was a very long day that Selina spent in her room, but it was the most profitable of her whole life. The flinty rock of her heart, which refused to be softened by the rain, was crushed and powdered by the hammer. The trodden path was hard; but the ploughshare could turn it, and make it fine for the seed. Her eyes were opened to see herself, in some degree, as she was. She could hardly have endured the sight, but that the same One who showed her sin showed also her Saviour.

That night Selina opened her heart to her mother as she had never done before, and received her full and free forgiveness.

"You have had a hard lesson, my child; but we will not grudge it," said Mrs. Weston. "It will be worth all it costs if it leads you home to your Father's house."

"I hope it has," said Selina. "Do you think it is wrong for me to hope that He has forgiven me?"

"No, my dear. Why should it be wrong for you to take Him at His word?"

"Well, you know, Mr. Martin used to say he had no faith in sudden conversions, and that the religious life must be a gradual growth."

"How many conversions can Mr. Martin find recorded in the New Testament that were not sudden?" asked Mrs. Weston. "If I am lost on the mountain in a fog, and the sun comes out and shows me that I *am* lost, it may take me a long time to get home, but it will not take me a minute to turn round

and set off in the right direction. Thank Heaven, you have turned round! It makes me shudder to think of the horrible danger you have escaped."

But Selina's trials were not all over, by any means. It was known in Oldbury that she had been on very intimate terms with Mrs. Orme, as she called herself; and, on examination, Kit was obliged to reveal the fact that she had seen Selina talking with the prisoner. What was known in Oldbury was known in Oldham, and Selina knew that the whole town was talking about her. Moreover, she was called as a witness on the trial; and, though her testimony amounted to nothing, except to show how she had herself been victimized, it was a terrible ordeal, and when at last she was dismissed, she felt, as if she could never hold up her head again. As she dropped into a seat beside her mother, a little hand sought hers, and a soft voice whispered, —

"O Selina! don't be angry with me. I didn't mean to tell, but they would make me."

"You couldn't help it," returned Selina, pressing Kit's hand.

"You see, I knew him the minute I saw him," continued Kit. "You don't know how it made me feel to see him talking to you, — just as it did to see the copperhead twisted round Eddy's ankle. I was scared to death, for I thought he knew me; but I was determined to warn you."

"You were real good, and I have always treated you so badly too," said Selina.

"Never mind," returned Kit. "It has all come right at last, only for poor uncle Phin; and I can't

help hoping it is right for him too. Uncle Phin wasn't naturally so bad, only he never had any mind of his own. He was always so easy to lead away. But somehow these people who are so easy to lead wrong don't seem to be so easy to lead right."

"Are you really going to live with Mrs. Van Zandt in New York?" asked Selina as they walked away from the court-room together.

"I am not going to live with her at first," answered Kit. "She says her house is too dull for a little girl: so I am to stay with Miss Ida's mother, and take lessons of her this winter."

"You will like that," observed Selina, "you are so fond of Miss Ida."

"Yes, it would be lovely only for leaving Symantha. But she says aunt Martha—mother, I mean: it seems so queer that aunt Martha should be my mother—Symantha says mother made uncle Phin promise to give me to Mrs. Van Zandt, before she died, and that is just what she should have chosen for me.

"And what is Symantha going to do?"

"Oh, Miss Armstrong has got her a place as nurse in some institution in New York where they take weak-minded people. It seems like a very hard place, but Symantha likes the idea; and she is just the one for the work, she had so much experience taking care of mother."

"And when are you going?"

"As soon as school closes. Selina, do you remember that first day Miss Armstrong taught, when I could not say the Lord's Prayer?"

"Yes, indeed ; and how I behaved !"

"That was about the best day of my life," continued Kit thoughtfully. "I shall never forget how different the world looked to me after Miss Armstrong told me I had a Father in heaven who loved me."

"And you believed it the very minute you heard it?" said Selina, "and you loved Him?"

"Why, yes, I couldn't help it," answered Kit simply.

"And I had been taught about Him all my life ; and yet, if any one had made me believe there was no God, I should have been rather glad," said Selina. "Your heart was the good ground, Kit ; but mine was so hard, it is a wonder that any thing good could ever grow in it."

There is little more to add to our story. When the school closed, Miss Armstrong proposed that Selina should accompany her on a visit to her sister in Colorado. It was a long journey, she said ; she should be glad of a companion, and her sister and niece would make Selina more than welcome. Mr. and Mrs. Weston gladly consented, willing to remove the girl for a time from the unavoidable annoyances which surrounded her in Oldham. But we all know the dangers which beset young ladies who go visiting in new States. Selina found employment as a teacher in one of the schools which Christian enterprise has set up. She returned home in a year, but not to stay. A gentleman who owns a great sheep-farm in those parts came on in the summer, and, overruling all objections on the score of

Selina's youth, carried her off in triumph. Aunt Betsy was present at the wedding, of course, and remarked that she had always known the Westons would never have any comfort out of that girl. Such sights as they had spent on her! and now, just as she was old enough to be good for something, off she went. Aunt Betsy hoped he was a respectable man; but there were queer folks out there, and she shouldn't wonder a bit if something was to happen. It is not supposed that Aunt Betsy will grow more amiable as she grows older.

Patience Fletcher recovered after a long illness; but she was never so well as before, and she was obliged perforce to give up a great deal of the work into Faith's hands. Under these circumstances Patience learned gradually to believe that the balance of the universe was not much disturbed though the teacup handles were turned east instead of west, and even to be resigned when the cat put her kittens in the second-best clothes-basket, and a fly got into the front-room. In a word, the thorns which had so long choked the good seed, being rooted up, she found there was room not only for the wheat which is the staff of life, but for the flowers which beautify it. Faith grew up a capital housewife, and Patience confessed that Faithie made the house pleasanter than ever she had done.

Poor Cordelia Richmond had the comfort of opening her heart before her death. Mr. Brace conveyed an inkling of the case to Dr. Madison, who at once called upon Mrs. Richmond with his sister, who was a very great lady in that world which Mrs.

Richmond beheld from afar with envious eyes. She could not for very shame refuse to let the Doctor see Cordelia when Milly told her, before him, that Cordelia had asked for him. The Doctor was a man of experience. He wasted no time in idle words, but went at once to the root of the matter; and before he left he had the comfort of laying the poor trembling child at her Lord's feet. Even Mrs. Richmond could not be angry when she saw how peaceful and happy Cordelia was after the interview.

Three days after, the poor child passed away in great peace and happiness. The next winter Mrs. Richmond married a very rich man with a great house, for which he wanted a mistress, and forthwith plunged into "society." Her new interest broke the force of her disappointment in Milly, who has turned out "very eccentric; just like her poor father, you know," Mrs. Richmond says. "But she is a good child, after all; and I let her take her own way." That way leads Milly to a great many strange places, to an Italian mission school, and a sewing-school; and not seldom to Mrs. Van Zandt, whose almoner she is among her poor pupils, — a circumstance which almost consoles her mother for her oddity.

Kit is staying with Ida Van Zandt at Rockdale, studying, and working very hard at her music. She spends most of her Sundays with Mrs. Van Zandt, who finds great delight in her society, and promises to take her to see Miss Armstrong next summer.

For Miss Armstrong is settled in Oldham for good. She has actually married Mr. Brace, and settled down in the Oldham parsonage, which has been

beautified to such an extent that it hardly knows itself. More than that, the parish has built a fine, convenient Sunday-school room, which it is Mr. Kettle's pride and delight to keep in the best of order; remarking, as he does nearly every Sunday, that he don't grudge the work so long as it keeps the wear and tear of the school out of *his* church. For Mr. Kettle looks upon the church and the minister, not to mention the minister's wife, cow, horse, and pig, as his own private property, and the best in their several ways to be found in the United States, and pays no heed to the remark of Aunt Betsy (also repeated every Sunday), that Mr. Brace may be all very well, but he will never fill Dr. Munson's pulpit.

We must now take our leave of Oldham and its people. Perhaps some time or other we may visit there again. I hope the moral of my story is clear enough to tell itself. To all of us comes the sower bearing precious seed. Shall we let it lie by the wayside, the prey of every wandering bird? shall we let the thorns grow up, and choke it, so that no fruit shall be brought to perfection? or shall we receive it into an honest and good heart, that it may bring forth fruit unto everlasting life?

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